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ABSTRACT

This book is an account of the development and implementation of the University of Massachusetts English Family Literacy Project, presented as a curriculum guide for others who may be involved in developing English-as-a-Second-Language and family literacy programs for immigrants and refugees. An introductory section describes the program, the process of writing the guide, and the intended audience and purpose of the guide, and offers questions and guidelines for group discussion of curriculum content and related issues. The guide is designed and recommended for use by a group rather than by individuals. Subsequent chapters address the following topics: (1) what constitutes family literacy; (2) the participatory approach to curriculum development; (3) determining program structure; (4) examining the process that occurs within the classroom; (5) involving students in the process of uncovering themes and issues as an integral part of classroom interaction (6) developing curriculum around themes using a variety of techniques, procedures, and activities; (7) using literacy to address real issues and make changes in the social context through collective effort; and (8) determining what counts as student progress. A list of over 130 resources is included. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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MAKING MEANING, MAKING CHANGE

A Guide to Participatory Curriculum Development for Adult ESL and Family Literacy

Elsa Auerbach
University of Massachusetts
English Family Literacy Project

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MAKING MEANING,

MAKING CHANGE

A Guide to

Participatory Curriculum Development for

Adult ESL and Family Literacy

Elsa Auerbach
University of Massachusetts
English Family Literacy Project

Boston, Massachusetts

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The work reported on in this guide was the result of a collaboration between the University of Massachusetts/Boston Bilingual/ESL Graduate Studies Program and the Community Learning Center (Cambridge), El Centro del Cardenal (The Cardinal Cushing Center for the Spanish Speaking, Boston), and the Jackson-Mann Community School (Boston). We would like to express our gratitude to the staff of those centers for welcoming the project and helping to guide it.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to the students whose work appears in this guide and to all the others who taught us about their ways of learning and teaching. Our thanks also go to Candace Mitchell, Cathie Wallace, the staff of the Cambridge Oral History Center, our co-workers in the Boston adult literacy community and the many others who shared their experience in workshops and training sessions. We would also like to express our gratitude to Donaldo Macedo, Director of the UMass Bilingual/ESL Graduate Studies Program for making this project possible through his many efforts on its behalf and his constant support. Finally, Barbara Graceffa deserves special acknowledgement for her unending and cheerful attention to all the details of making the project a reality from the moment it was conceived to its final stages.

INTRODUCTION

What this book is.... and what it's NOT

This book is written as a retroactive documentation of what teachers, students and staff learned in the process of implementing the University of Massachusetts Family Literacy Project. Our hope is that it will serve as a guide to others involved in developing adult ESL and family literacy programs for immigrants and refugees. If there's one thing that we've learned during the course of our project, it's that every group of students is different: what happens with any given class depends on who the participants are, what their concerns are, and the contexts of their lives. Each group brings its own set of family situations, language and literacy backgrounds, community problems, employment circumstances, and cultural strengths to the learning situation, and each of these factors must be taken into account in developing the curriculum. The most effective curricula are those tailored to and developed with participating learners. The key in a participatory approach is centering instruction on the real (rather than imagined) issues of each group; the only way to do this is through collaborative investigation and decision-making.

It is for this reason that we have written a **curriculum guide** rather than a **curriculum**: we don't believe that a single, generic, pre-packaged sequence of themes, language items or activities can possibly fit any set of circumstances or students. *Instead of trying to **cover** content that has been predetermined, teachers need to **discover** content that's important to their own students.* To do this, they need a conceptual framework, a set of procedures for creating 'context-specific' curricula emerging out of particular conditions, and concrete examples of the process in practice. In accordance with this perspective, Making Meaning, Making Change is intended as a *description* rather than a *prescription:* we aren't trying to tell anyone what to do or what content to cover tomorrow; rather we are describing what we did, why we did it and how others can follow similar processes to discover what's relevant for their students and involve them in building curriculum around it.

Who are we?

The University of Massachusetts English Family Literacy Project was one of many projects funded by the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA) through Title VII, the Bilingal Education Act, for the purpose of providing English literacy instruction to the parents of children in bilingual education programs. Our project was a collaboration between the Bilingual/ESL Graduate Studies Program at UMass/Boston and three community-based adult literacy centers, the Jackson-Mann Community School, El Centro del Cardenal (the Cardinal Cushing Center for the Spanish-Speaking) and the Community Learning Center. Each of the sites is a well-established literacy center with deep ties and a long history of service in the community where it is located; the family literacy work was thus an additional component to on-going programs, sharing certain features of these programs but differing in other ways. We worked primarily with adults, serving approximately 150 students per year at the three sites. Students came from many language groups (up to 26 at one time); only one site, the Cardinal Cushing Center, serves a single group.

Staff of the project at any given time included three full-time teachers, a half-time curriculum specialist and a coordinator. Ann Cason, Rosario (Charo) Gomez-Sanford, Loren McGrail and Madeline Rhum were the teachers, (Charo replaced Loren at the end of the second year); Andy Nash was the curriculum specialist (in addition to teaching half-time through other funding) and Elsa Auerbach was the coordinator. All of us are women, three are mothers, four speak English as a first language, and one (Charo) is a Bolivian who speaks Quechua as her first language, Spanish as her second and English as her fifth! While we had different job titles, we tried to function in a participatory way with each other, sharing decision-making, curriculum development, classroom concerns and dissemination tasks. None of this was without struggle: we had to work at redefining roles and relationships along the way in our attempt to 'practice what we preach.'

Behind every sentence of this description, there's a story. The fact that the project was a university-community collaboration, that it was tied to but separate from existing programs, that students spoke many languages, that teachers were similar in some ways but different in others - all of these aspects of our own context shaped the direction of our project and the issues we had to address along the way. We'll save the stories for later, but it's important to note that our work, like work with students, was the result of a particular set of choices and conditions.

How was this Guide written?

Although our goal was to be fully participatory in all aspects of our work, we often divided tasks according to differing roles. An example of this is the way that this guide came to be written. As we discussed producing our final report, a variety of perspectives emerged on what it should look like. The teachers felt strongly about maintaining an independent voice to represent their experiences in the classroom: they wanted to ensure that accounts of practice were presented from practitioners' perspective. Thus, they formed their own writing group, producing Talking Shop: A Curriculum Sourcebook for Participatory Adult ESL,[1] a collection of 'windows on the classroom'. At the same time, however, we felt a need for a different kind of piece which would generalize from our collective experience, weaving it together into an overview of the curriculum development process as a whole; this, ultimately was to become Making Meaning, Making Change.

Thus, we ended up with two volumes which complement each other and should be seen as companion pieces, yet each representing a different focus and a different perspective. Where one analyzes theoretical and methodological aspects of the components of curriculum development, the other focuses on particular accounts of curriculum cycles as they played themselves out in the classroom. Where the guide is written primarily from the perspective of the coordinator, Talking Shop is written fully from the teachers' perspective. In each case, we started with group discussions of content, format and organization; however, the teachers' writing was much more collaborative in the revising stages. They met regularly to share drafts, and give feedback; in the early stages, I got feedback to the extent teachers had the time to provide it, but as the funding ran out, the process became increasingly individual. Up to the end, Andy Nash was a careful, critical reader of drafts, helping to keep me honest in my representations of our work. Although the process was relatively individual, the content comes from extensive documentation of group work collected throughout the project - minutes of meetings and workshops, teaching materials, examples of student work, and teachers' journals. Thus, the "we" in this guide means different things at different points: sometimes it reflects direct reporting of group discussions, paraphrasing or quoting teachers as they share insights and experiences; sometimes it represents my own interpretation/extension of analyses reached through a group process.

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[1]See Resources for ordering information.

Who are you?

One of the first questions we grappled with in writing this guide was 'who is it for?' If it is for program administrators, academics, funders or policy makers, shouldn't it be written in a somewhat formal, academic style? If it's for teachers and practitioners, shouldn't it be written in a more popular style, with more focus on method and practice?

We concluded that the guide should be intentionally and explicitly for both: on the one hand, it's important for teachers to have an understanding of where their work fits in the bigger picture of educational policy and a conceptual framework to guide practice. At the same time, it's important for policy makers and program administrators to have a concrete sense of what happens in day-to-day classroom life and why. All too often administrators, academics and practitioners travel in separate circles, meeting only over the budget; the guide is intended to help to bridge this gap by integrating research findings and accounts of teachers' experiences, theoretical developments and practical suggestions.

Our hope is that you will adapt it to your own realities by using it interactively - evaluating what we say in light of your experiences, settings and values, and taking from it what is relevant to your context. The principles of participatory learning - sharing ideas and working out ways of putting them into practice together - apply as much to educators as to students. There are structured exercises throughout the guide to facilitate this kind of interaction, so that you can draw out your own experience and ideas as a reference point for what you read.

Whatever conclusions we came to in our own work were the result of a group process and our sense is that ***this guide can best be utilized by a group of people, reading and reacting to it together.*** This means teachers need time to meet together regularly: an essential component of any family literacy program is ongoing staff development. We hope that this guide will be used in that kind of a setting, as a catalyst for groups implementing their own programs. The group exercises included in it serve two functions: first, to facilitate the development of your own group process, making assumptions explicit, sharing experience and adapting the model to your own conditions; and second, to model the kind of exercises you might want to do with students. We'd like to invite you to get the ball rolling using the following exercises to begin to uncover or make explicit some of your own ideas about family literacy.

Before you read further, take a few minutes to think about what this picture means to you:

What do you see in the picture? What are the people doing?

How do you think the mother feels? Why?

How do you think the son feels? Why?

How do you feel about what they are doing? Why?

When the same picture was presented to students in an English Family Literacy class, they responded in a variety of ways. Here are some of the things they wrote:

This is a mother and son. The mother and son are sitting in the living room on the sofa. They are reading a book in the living room sitting on the sofa. She is happy. Her son is not happy He is angry. She is a teacher. He is a student. They speak English The book is small. The mother has glasses

This is a mother and son. The mother and son are sitting in the living room on the sofa because he's reading a book. His mother is sitting in the living room. The mother is happy because her son speaks English. She's happy to teach her son. Her son is not happy because he is reading a book and he doesn't understand. The son can't read. The mother is tired because she works everyday

As you look at these comments, what do you notice?
How are the students' comments the same or different?
How are they the same or different from yours?

What's interesting about these stories is that although they are similar in certain ways, each story reflects a somewhat different perspective: the 'reader' of the picture brings his/her own experience, feelings and values to bear in constructing the meaning of the picture. In the same way, our understanding of "family literacy" varies depending on who we are, what our experience has been and where we're going. Just as each viewer projects onto a photo something from him/herself, the participants in family literacy programs project their own issues and concerns onto the process of developing programs. Thus, our sense is that ***the starting point for anyone embarking on a family literacy project needs to be some exploration of your own attitudes and feelings toward family literacy.*** To continue this process, we'd like to invite you to read and role play the following dialogue:

The scene is a kitchen in a Chinese home; the mother has just come from a long day of stitching and has started preparing dinner. The daughter is sitting at the kitchen table doing her homework. The conversation takes place in Chinese.

Daughter: Ma, I need $3.50 for the book club.

Ma: The what?

Daughter: The book club. You send in money and they send you books. The teacher told me to bring it in tomorrow.

Ma: Stop bothering me. You always want money. You know I don't have $3.50.

Daughter: But my teacher said I have to bring it in tomorrow.

Ma: I have a hard enough time paying the rent. The school is supposed to give you books anyway.

Daughter: Never mind.

What are your responses to this dialogue? Talk about your reactions to it with others, using the following questions if they help get your discussion going.

Guidelines for discussion

What do you think is going on here?

How do you think the mother feels in this episode?

How do you think the daughter feels?

What would the teacher's reaction be if she heard this conversation?

What is your reaction?

Does this scene seem realistic?

Does it relate to anything in your own experience as a teacher? a parent? a student?

What do you think the main problem/s or issue/s are here?

What factors are contributing to this conflict? What are the underlying causes of this conflict?

What can be done in situations like this? How might this problem be addressed?

What do parents already do to support their children's learning? What else might they do?

What do teachers do to bridge the gap between home and school? What else might they do?

Now make a list of the concerns and differences of opinion that came up as you considered this scene. If you are a teacher, talk about the scene and questions with your students. How do your reactions compare with theirs?

There are probably as many different responses to this scene as there are readers: some of you may feel that the mother's values are skewed - she's not supportive of her daughter's education and doesn't understand the importance of reading. Others may feel sympathetic to the mother - she works hard all day, barely able to make ends meet, and comes home to demands by the daughter. Some may think the teacher is imposing unrealistic demands and being insensitive to the economic reality of the children's families. Some may feel that the mother needs to revise her priorities while others may feel that the teacher needs to develop more cultural awareness.

The point is that, again, how you respond depends on who you are, what your experience is, and what your hopes are. In a sense, this little scene and the interpretations of it are a microcosm of the issues facing family literacy practitioners and policy-makers nationally. Increasingly, educators are becoming aware on the one hand of the importance of family contributions to the literacy development of children, and on the other hand, of the enormous gaps in communication between home and school. In the case of foreign-born families, the distance is even greater: parents and teachers may speak different languages, have different expectations about schooling, and see their own and each others' roles differently. Further, parents themselves may not have had much opportunity for schooling or literacy acquisition.

In an attempt to bridge these differences, policy-makers have begun to focus on programs which develop literacy within the home, and/or strengthen parental involvement in the schools. As a result of this recognition of the importance of increasing parental roles in literacy development and schooling, there has been a proliferation of family literacy programs nationally. While there is general agreement on the importance of involving families in literacy development, a range of perspectives on their goals, structure and content has begun to emerge. Your own questions and responses probably reflect some of these perspectives emerging in the family literacy debate nationally.

At this point, take a few minutes to generate your own responses to the following questions; list your responses on newsprint for future reference.

*What should family literacy programs stress (content)?
*How should family literacy programs be structured (form)?
*How should family literacy curricula be designed (process)?
*What goals should family literacy programs have (outcomes)?

Questionnaire

The following statements represent different opinions about family literacy. As you read each one, think about whether you agree or disagree with it and why. First respond to the statements individually, exploring your own reactions. Then, if you're working with others, discuss your various reactions in the group.

1. Parents of bilingual students often don't provide positive literacy environments for their children. They don't read much themselves, don't help their children with homework and don't have reading materials in their homes.

2.Parents of bilingual students often support their children's literacy development in a variety of ways, from helping with homework to talking about what's happening in school to providing emotional support.

3. I don't know much about the family literacy environments of bilingual students, how parents support their children's literacy development or use literacy themselves. This is something I need to find out more about.

4. There is a great range of ways bilingual families use literacy which vary from culture to culture and family to family.

5. The best way for parents to support their children's literacy development is by helping with homework and making special time in the day to work on literacy; family literacy programs should teach parents how to become their children's academic tutors.

6. The best way for parents to teach literacy is by reading to their children.

7. There are many ways to support children's literacy development; what is most important is integrating literacy into the day-to-day activities of family life and using literacy to accomplish the tasks of daily living.

8. Parents of bilingual children should use English as much as possible at home to provide a basis for academic success.

9. What counts is not use of English in the home, but the quality of linguistic interaction; for this reason, support of first language proficiency and literacy development are important.

10. Family literacy programs should teach parents about the American educational system, values, and ways of interacting with school personnel. Parents should be taught how to meet the school's expectations about involvement and interaction.

11. Family literacy programs should aim to change values and attitudes toward literacy.

12. Family literacy programs should start by learning about participants' own literacy practices, values and attitudes toward schooling.

13. Family literacy programs should help parents determine their own values and expectations so that they can participate in their children's schooling on their own terms.

14. Family literacy programs should support parents in using literacy to address their own concerns, whether or not these concerns are directly related to children's schooling.

The differences in perspectives of the above statements are representative of the range of opinions which currently exist among family literacy policy makers, program designers and practitioners. Making Meaning, Making Change will present one particular perspective on these issues developed in the UMass Family Literacy Project. As you continue to read the guide, we hope you will refer back to the issues, questions and opinions which you have identified in these introductory exercises and that they will serve as a reference point for you in evaluating the development in your own thinking in relation to what is presented in the guide and what you learn from your own practice.

We don't expect that anyone will read this guide linearly, from beginning to end, but rather that you'll use it as a resource, going back and forth between our ideas and your practice, selecting and experimenting with different sections as they become relevant to your context.

The structure of the book mirrors the curriculum development process. It starts by elaborating the **conceptual framework** for a participatory approach, first, in Chapter 1 with a presentation of the rationale for our approach to family literacy and then, in Chapter 2, with an explanation of principles of participatory literacy education. Chapter 3 examines **structural issues** in setting up programs in terms of their implications for curriculum development and classroom dynamics.

Moving into the classroom, Chapter 4 presents an **overview** of the curriculum development process and general issues that arise in implementing it. The following three Chapters each discuss different **components** of participatory curriculum development: Chapter 5 examines ways of **finding student issues**; Chapter 6 discusses **participatory tools** for developing language, literacy and critical thinking around themes; and Chapter 7 explores ways of using literacy to take **action for change** both inside and outside the classroom.

An analysis of different perspectives on **evaluation** and resources for alternative, participatory evaluation are presented in Chapter 8. The book ends with a listing of **resources** including materials to use with students (both traditional ESL texts and alternative resources) as well as articles, books, newsletters, etc. for teachers interested in pursuing a participatory approach to adult ESL/family literacy.

Chapter 1

WHAT IS FAMILY LITERACY?

We started this guide by inviting you to make explicit some of your own 'start up' ideas about family literacy. Now we're going to ask you to step back from these ideas and take a more general look at 'what's out there' - the range of approaches and models that others have developed. This kind of analysis is important because the starting point for curriculum development has to be a sound and informed conceptualization of what family literacy is.

As curriculum theorists point out, every approach to curriculum development reflects a certain view of learners and learning. Very often, these views are implicit in the way curriculum is developed and structured, in the choices about curriculum content and goals, and in the patterning of social relations in the classroom. This chapter will look at the predominant model of family literacy, attempting to uncover its hidden assumptions and examining them in light of research about family literacy. Based on this analysis, we will then present an alternative model which derives from a different set of assumptions.

Our Process

We began our own process of developing a conceptualization of family literacy with the notion that *it was important to understand the social context of our own work* - that program development needs to be grounded in an understanding of questions like:

**Why is family literacy becoming such a popular trend now?*
**What models are now being used to involve English and language minority families in children's literacy development?*
**What assumptions are these models based on?*
**What does the research say about how families contribute to the literacy development of children?*
**How do their contributions vary according to class and culture?*
**What alternatives are there to the predominant models?*

Of course, underlying these questions is the central question, *What is family literacy and what should we be doing in our program?* Like others (yourselves probably included), we brought a wealth of experience teaching adult ESL and literacy in a variety of contexts (from refugee camps to workplace and community based programs), but because the "field" is relatively new, none of us had worked in family literacy programs before. Thus, although we had common assumptions and a shared orientation to our work, we started with the implicit assumption that somewhere 'out there' there was a single, pre-existing answer to the *What is family literacy?"* question and our job was to find it.

We embarked on this investigation process by doing three things: 1) reviewing studies of home literacy contexts and family contributions to literacy development of children from different classes and cultures (ethnographic research), 2) looking at existing family literacy program models, and perhaps most importantly, 3) learning from our students, investigating with them their own family literacy contexts. Our curriculum specialist, Andy Nash, compiled an extensive annotated bibliography of the studies we reviewed in this process.[1]

What we found is that existing programs are often not informed by research findings: the evidence about literacy acquisition and implications for practice pointed in one direction while the predominant approach to program design pointed in another. Thus, it soon became clear to us that we needed to forge our own answers to the question, *What is family literacy?* and collaboratively construct our own model. The analysis that follows summarizes what we discovered in this investigation process and presents the rationale for the approach of this Guide. (See Auerbach 1989 for a fuller review of the literature).

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[1]Nash, A. English Family Literacy: An Annotated Bibliography. See Resources for ordering information.

The Social Context for Family Literacy

Ten years ago, the term **family literacy** was virtually unknown. Debates about literacy development centered mainly on what schools were doing right or wrong. Now, as we enter the 1990's, we are immersed in a new climate of concern with family contributions to literacy development, initiatives like the Barbara Bush Family Literacy Foundation, Even Start legislation and the third generation of Title VII OBEMLA Family Literacy Projects.

This growing family literacy trend is situated in the context of alarmist national concern with the 'literacy crisis': drop-out statistics and declining academic achievement make headlines, with illiteracy being blamed for poverty, crime, drug abuse, homelessness and the lack of international competitiveness. The fastest growing sector of the workforce is the unskilled sector (made up largely of immigrants and language minorities); increasingly employers and economists are concerned that their literacy skills are inadequate to meet the changing demands of the workplace. Compounding these changes in demographics and technology is the fact that, according to the predominant analysis, schools are not preparing students for the kinds of literacy required in the workplace.

While economic factors have thrust illiteracy onto the national agenda, family inadequacies are increasingly being targeted as its root cause. National policy makers argue that we must look beyond the school system to understand the literacy crisis; former Secretary of Education Terence Bell (1988), for example, stated that, "Not even the best classroom can make up for failure in the family." The prevailing analysis is that illiteracy breeds illiteracy in a kind of plague passed from one generation to another, creating a permanent, self-perpetuating underclass. A news article circulated by the Barbara Bush Family Literacy Foundation likens this "intergenerational cycle of illiteracy" to a hereditary illness.

> The point is that literacy, like illiteracy, is a heritable trait; children catch it from their parents. And it may be that the best way to launch an attack on illiteracy is to treat it as a family disease. (W. Raspberry, "Barbara Bush's Pet Project," Washington Post, March 11, 1989)

The argument here is that parents themselves don't read, and consequently can't act as positive models to their children, help their children with homework, or read to their children. One family literacy specialist goes so far as to argue that "in many of these families there is not only no habit of reading, there's not even a habit

of speaking to the kids." (Nickse 1989). Further, these illiterate parents, according to the prevailing analysis, "also tend to have poor parenting skills." (Raspberry 1989). For language minority families, these inadequacies are compounded by the lack of English literacy skills and knowledge about the American educational system. These parents don't participate in their children's schooling by attending school functions, communicating with teachers, etc. The result, according to this analysis is that, "illiteracy is condemning millions of adult Americans to poverty and destroying the life chances of their children." (Raspberry 1989). In this view, the problem is that illiteracy is causing poverty which, in turn, leads to a host of other social ills and the solution is massive social intervention to correct illiteracy at its source: the family.

It is in the context of this analysis that most existing family literacy programs have been developed. However, it is important to note that this is not the only way of interpreting the dynamics of the literacy crisis. An alternative analysis is that the current attention to illiteracy exceeds what is warranted by actual statistics about literacy levels (Miller 1987); in fact, real literacy levels are rising rather than falling and the crisis can better be explained as a kind of ideological smokescreen for underlying socio-economic problems inherent in our system (Shor 1986). In other words, social inequities, poverty and the accompanying problems of crime, homelessness, and so on are the result of economic policies rather than family inadequacies; illiteracy is a consequence of poverty rather than a cause of it. To the extent that there are 'family inadequacies,' they can be attributed to a system which forces parents into daily struggles for survival at the expense of literacy development (Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988). The solution, according to this analysis, lies not in trying to reform or remold parents, but in changing the conditions of their lives which get in the way of literacy development. While this analysis does not underestimate parents' role in children's education, it suggests very different approaches to program design.

The distinction between these two approaches and their differing implications for practice is rarely made explicit by policy makers or program designers. When we examined current family literacy program models for immigrants and refugees, most seemed to be informed by the former analysis. The listing on the following page shows the kinds of practices we found to be most prevalent among existing programs.

Current Practices

As we looked at current family literacy programs for immigrants and refugees, we found the following practices to be most prevalent:

1) **Giving parents guidelines, materials and training to carry out school-like activities in the home, including:**

-teaching parents to become home tutors
-giving parents guidelines/techniques for helping with homework
-training parents in specific behaviorally oriented methods for reading to or with children
-giving parents literacy activity tasks to do with their children (reading or writing a recipe, etc.)

2) **Training parents in 'effective parenting,' including:**

-teaching parents how to talk and play with their children according to mainstream discourse patterns
-teaching parents about 'effective discipline'
-teaching parents about health, nutrition, drug abuse, etc.
-teaching parents about child development

3) **Teaching parents about the culture of American schooling, including:**

-teaching parents to read and respond to school communiques, read report cards, etc.
-teaching parents how to interact with school personnel (calling in sick, responding in parent-teacher conferences, etc.)
-identifying communication breakdowns by interviewing school personnel and teaching parents to conform to school expectations in these areas

4) **Developing parents' language and literacy through skills, grammar and behavioral approaches, including:**

-using phonics workbooks and other bottom-up approaches to literacy similar to those used in many elementary schools
-teaching ESL through grammar-based and functional approaches
-using competency-based systems focused on changing parental behaviors

The Transmission of School Practices Model

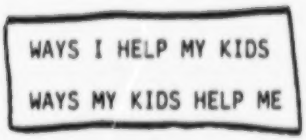
While these programs take many forms, what often unifies them is the view that their primary task is to strengthen home and school ties by transmitting the culture of school literacy through the vehicle of the family. Most of them start with the notion that there is something wrong with what's already going on in family contexts, that as educators we know what parents should be doing, and that our job is to change their skills and behaviors so that they can be more effective in the areas which we have identified. Specifically, the goal often seems to be to transform home contexts into sites for mainstream literacy interactions and to inculcate parents with the skills and behaviors necessary to interact on the schools' terms. Parents are taught about mainstream ways of relating to print and specific school-like literacy tasks that they can do with their children. The direction of this model is **from the schools - to the parents - to the children.**

The curriculum development process thus starts with needs and practices identified by 'experts' - in many cases school personnel. For example, one program is based on a needs assessment done by interviewing teachers and school administrators about communication breakdowns with foreign-born parents. Problems cited included parents being too pushy, telling teachers what to do (eg. saying, "I want my child to read more."). The curriculum focuses on competencies to teach parents how to meet teachers' expectations in order to avoid this type of problem.

In this process, the culture of the school and the established ways of schooling remain intact, unchallenged; it is the parents who must accommodate to the schools'expectations rather than the schools accomodating to the cultural diversity of the students. As Davies, (1980, 72) says, "[In most forms of parental involvement], schools identify problems, determine goals/program needs and then ask the home for help but only on the school's terms." We call this the *"transmission of school practices"* model.

As we examined evidence of what actually happens in families of different class and cultural backgrounds, it became clear that this transmission of school practices model is based on a number of questionable assumptions. These include assumptions about the home literacy contexts of language minority students, about how literacy development takes place, about how parents contribute to this process, about the role of English in this process, about the relative importance of home and school factors, and about how the social context interacts with literacy acquisition. These questionable assumptions are presented on the following pages along with a sampling of the counterevidence we found in our review of the literature (see Auerbach 1989 for a fuller analysis).

The following is an example of what parents said about their own ways of helping children with school work despite language barriers:



Write your ideas about the ways you and your kids help each other.
Use the information on the blackboard to help you.

I help my kids.
I teach them good things.
I play with them. I protect
them. I correct them.
My Kids bring me things.
My Kids will teach me English.
My Kids make me happy.
Maybe they will take care of me.

Gebre Goso

Assumption #1: Home Contexts

Transmission Model

The homes of low-income, minority and ESL students are "literacy impoverished" with limited reading material, parents who don't read either to themselves or to their children, don't provide models of literacy use. They can't help their children because of their own inadequacies and don't support their children's literacy develop. Further they don't value literacy or encourage their children to value it.

Counterevidence

*A study of families living below the poverty level, where day to day survivial is a struggle, revealed they used literacy for a wide variety of purposes, situations and audiences; homes were filled with print and literacy was an integral part of day to day life (Talylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988).

*An investigation of home factors contributing to the literacy acquisition of low-income elementary school students found a range of literacy practices and materials in the homes of working class, minority and ESL students, concluding, "explanations implicating the absence of literacy in low-income homes as the source of children's reading failure are simply wrong." (Harvard Families and Literacy Study, Snow 1987:127).

*A study of literacy among Mexican immigrant families found that parents with little education used a range of text types in a variety of ways as an integral part of daily life; they valued literacy and wanted to develop their own skills to help their children, and already supported their children's literacy development in numerous specific ways, eg. rewarding children for good grades, work well done and completed homework, as well as providing emotional and physical support. (Delgado-Gaitan 1987)

*Study after study claims that immigrants not only value literacy, but see it as the key to mobility; for many the desire to get a better education for their children is the primary reason for immigrating to the U.S.(Goldenberg 1984; Diaz, Mehan & Moll 1986; Delgado-Gaitan 1987; Chall & Snow 1982).

This is what one of our students wrote about how she supports her children in ways that go beyond narrow 'help with homework.' This piece of writing itself exemplifies the "You scratch my back I scratch your back" dynamic in this family: the woman who wrote this is herself a beginning ESL student with minimal first language literacy skills. She collaborated with her daughter in a language experience process to produce this piece. The mother told the daughter what she wanted to say and daughter helped the mother to write it.

I help my Kids by staying
together with them. By talking to
them. I help them by confronting
them and telling them whats wrong
or Right. Just as they do me.
I help them when they need a
favor or money just as they do me.
It's Just like you scratch my
back I scratch your back with
my family.

Maria Bento

The following passage was written by the daughter of one of our students in a journal to the mother's teacher. It illustrates the complexity of parent-child role reversals in immigrant families, providing further evidence that the power of parental learning in immigrant and refugee families may be that it reduces the parents' dependency on children for literacy transactions, thus freeing the children to attend to their own development.

> *I'm glad my mother is going to school so she could speak English. It finally mean that I don't have to translate for her every time she watches a movie that she don't understand.I usually have to explain it to her. It must be hard for you to teach the students. You've also got to be patient. If one of your students don't understand what you mean then you have to explain it in a different way. I'll never be a good teacher because I'm not good at teaching...*

Assumption #2: Parental Roles

Transmission Model

What accounts for the success of literate children is a transfer of skills from parents to child; the natural direction of learning is ***from parent to child.*** It is the parents' role to create the conditions for transferring skills to the child.

Counterevidence

*A supportive context for sharing literacy may be more important than any direct transfer of skills, work on homework, etc. A study in which children read to their parents on a regular basis showed significant gains in the children's reading scores, even greater than gains made by children working with reading specialists at school for an equivalent time. Low parental English literacy skills did not detract from the results. (Tizard, Schofield and Hewison 1982)

*The distribution and sharing of language and literacy practices in immigrant and refugee families is complex and by no means one directional from parents to children. Family members each contribute in the areas that they are strongest: children often help parents with homework rather than vice versa, act as interpreters for them and deal with the outside world. (Diaz, Moll & Mehan 1986; Delgado-Gaitan 1987; Auerbach 1989)

"The approach that has been taken in recent year has been to develop parent education programmes which very often provide parents with a battery of specific activities which are designed to teach reading, and yet very little available evidence suggests that parents with children who read without difficulty actually undertake such 'teaching' on a regular basis. The present study suggests that there are great variations in approaches the parents have evolved in working with their children and that the thread that unites the families is the recognition that learning to read takes place on a daily basis as part of everyday life." (Taylor 1983: 101)

Assumption #3: Family Contexts of Successful Readers

Transmission Model

What accounts for the success of literate children is a family home environment where parents do specific school-like tasks with them. Parents of successful readers make time in their day to read to their children, help with homework and do add-on school-like activities with them . These structured home learning activities are the key to family literacy and should be replicated in the homes of low -literate adults.

Counterevidence

*A range of factors contribute to literacy development. There is no one to one correlation between parents' literacy level, amount of time doing literacy work with children and overall achievement. Indirect factors like frequency of children's outings with adults, amount of time spent interacting with adults, level of financial stress and independent parental outings had a stronger effect on many aspects of reading and writing than did direct literacy activities like help with homework. (Chall & Snow 1982)

*An ethnographic study of what happens in the homes of successful readers showed that parents in these families often intentionally avoided doing school-like activities with children. Further, interactions around print varied from family to family (there was no single practice that could account for success) but in all cases, these interactions were integrated into the day to day activities of family life, occuring "at the very margins of awareness" rather than being consciously structured add-on activities. (Taylor 1983)

*A study of the home contexts of low-income inner-city families indicated that similar dynamics are at work across class lines: homes of successful readers provide a variety of contexts for using literacy; it is integrated in a socially significant way into many aspects of family life rather than being isolated as a separate add-on instructional activity. The more diverse the contexts for using literacy to address family concerns, the wider the range of literacy achievement factors affected. (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines 1988)

Here a teacher has transcribed a discussion reflecting students' understanding of the importance of supporting first language development:

I asked them why Mr. and Mrs. DiCarlo were upset. The answer was pretty clear from the story. Then I asked them how they felt about these same issues within their own families. Most people identified strongly with the parents. Francois, however identified with the son in his process of acculturation. I subtitle this discussion, "culture, to change or not to change?" Here's some of what they said:

Francois: YOu need to change and learn the language.
Vasilios: (refering to the loss of the native language) What happens when you go to church? What language does the priest speak?
Francois: If mykids want to go to an American church they can go that's OK.
Vaslios: My kidswent to American/English school during the day and to Greek school in the afternoon. They read,speak and write both languages.
Maria: My sistere's kids (3boys) only speak English They don't understand anything in Creole. I used to tell my nephew in Creole "You're ugly." My nephew didn't understand anything. Everyone laughed except him. He told his mom that he didn't like it when he was at my house everyone spoke Creole and laughed at him. He told his mom that he wanted to learn to speak Creole. The next time I saw him, I said the same thing to him and he said, "Don't call me ugly." He had learnedto speak Creole. His mother taught him.
Hilda: In my family all the kids are bi-lingual. My two grown daughters work downtown. They get good money because they are bi-lingual. I have two kids still at home. I read Spanish books to them.
Elsa: To keep the language is important. We have to speak our language at home. Tell our stories. Tell them about the situation in our country. You don't know if you will go back one day.
Maria: You have to explain everything (about the old country) to them.
Gebre: To keep the language is very important. 2 of our kids were born in Sudan and their native language is Arabic. I speak Arabic at home with my wife. I'm trying to teach them Oromo, too. I buy casettes and record something (in my language) and play the tape for them.
Vasilios: Use the tapes to tell stories.

Assumption #4: Use of English in the Home

Transmission Model

Children of immigrant parents are at a disadvantage because their parents don't speak English with them at home and can't help them with their English literacy development. Using English in the home enhances proficiency; parents should be encouraged to develop their own English literacy skills so that they can assist their children.

Counterevidence

*It is the quality of linguistic interaction between parent and child which is most important in supporting academic development; because parents can negotiate meaning best in their first language, they should be supported in doing so. (Wells 1986; Cummins 1981)

*A solid basis of literacy development in one language enhances literacy acquisition in another. For language minority students a strong basis of development in the first language is critical for acquisition of English. Emphasizing only the second language may, undermine the possibilities for developing proficiency in either language. (Cummins 1981)

*A positive attitude to toward the first language facilitates acquisition of the second language. (Gardner and Lambert 1972)

*Patterns of language use in the family are complex and situationally conditioned; to attempt to impose use of English fails to take into account affective and socio-cultural factors. (Auerbach 1989)

In the following piece of writing, a student talks about her concern about a particular issue affecting her child; she ends by expressing the view parental participation is important because of the message it sends to the teacher.

I have a problem about my son Albert in the school because many friends are smoking. My son was in a group smoking when he cuts classes. They will call their parents If the principal catches him when he is outside when doesn't supposed to, he gets suspended. If after the conference the principal determines: that there are grounds for an expulsion hearing. The principal may recommend explusion to the superintendent. The parents should go to all of the meeting that the parent-teacher organization at school one afternoon each month. Because you help your son's or daughter's progress in class. If you help the teacher, the teacher help your children.

Hilda Ramos

Assumption # 5: School vs. Home Factors

Transmission Model

The cause of literacy problems lies in home factors; there is a direct relationship between home factors and school achievement. What schools are doing is adequate and needs to be reinforced at home. Children would benefit if parents did more of what schools are already doing at home.

Counterevidence

*The importance of home vs. school factors varies with children's grade level: before Grade 3, either literate and stimulating home environments or demanding, enriching classrooms can make good readers but after Grade 3, school factors seem to be more critical. While strong parental support could compensate for weak schooling up to Grade 3, even children with strong home support made virtually no progress if the school wasn't doing its job after Grade 3. School factors included availability of a wide variety of reading materials, uses of literacy, amount and nature of writing, use of the library and quality of instruction. (Snow 1987)

*A case study of refugee children showed that the children with the weakest home factors (illiterate mother, few reading materials, etc.) made great progress in classes where the teacher encouraged daily writing, provided a wide variety of reading materials, assigned a variety of writing tasks and subordinated subskills work to the creation of meaning. Conversely, a child from a 'print rich' home, who had school supplies, texts and overt parental support made little progress with reading and writing in a classroom where student focused on subskills, filling in blanks in workbooks, copying definitions, etc. (Urzua 1986)

*Often the ways that parents shape school factors is more important than the ways school factors shape home contexts: one of the most critical factors affecting children's achievement is parents' willingness to advocate for them (making concerns about academics known to teachers). This in turn shapes teachers' perceptions with consequences for the students' achievement. (Harvard Families and Literacy Study, Chall & Snow 1982)

"Considering literacy in this cultural context emphasizes the need for educators to question seriously whether the present adult literacy programs and parent educational programs tend to be too literally literate. It is entirely possible that the undue emphasis on specific didactic encounters might unwittingly undermine the opportunity for reading and writing to become socially significant in the lives of both adults and children, and therefore an integral facet of family life." (Taylor 1983:88)

Assumption #6: The Role of Social Context

Transmission Model

Contextual factors (like socio-economic conditions, cultural differences, family problems, etc.) are obstacles to learning and get in the way of literacy development. Housing, health care, employment or child care needs must be overcome or addressed outside of class as a precondition or supplement to classroom participation.

Further, cultural differences are an impediment to participation; immigrants and refugees whose views of education differ from those of the American system must be taught to overcome these differences in order to participate.

Non-mainstream literacy practices are at best irrelevant and at worst detrimental to academic achievement; the curricular focus should be on mainstream literacy practices, forms and uses.

Counterevidence

*Contextual factors - external conditions which shape family life - are central to literacy development. Literacy becomes socially significant in family life to the extent that it is integrated with the day to day concerns of family life and used as a tool to address these concerns. What characterizes the homes of successful readers is precisely the ability to make literacy a significant factor in dealing with the conditions of everyday living. (Collier 1986; Taylor 1983, Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines 1988)

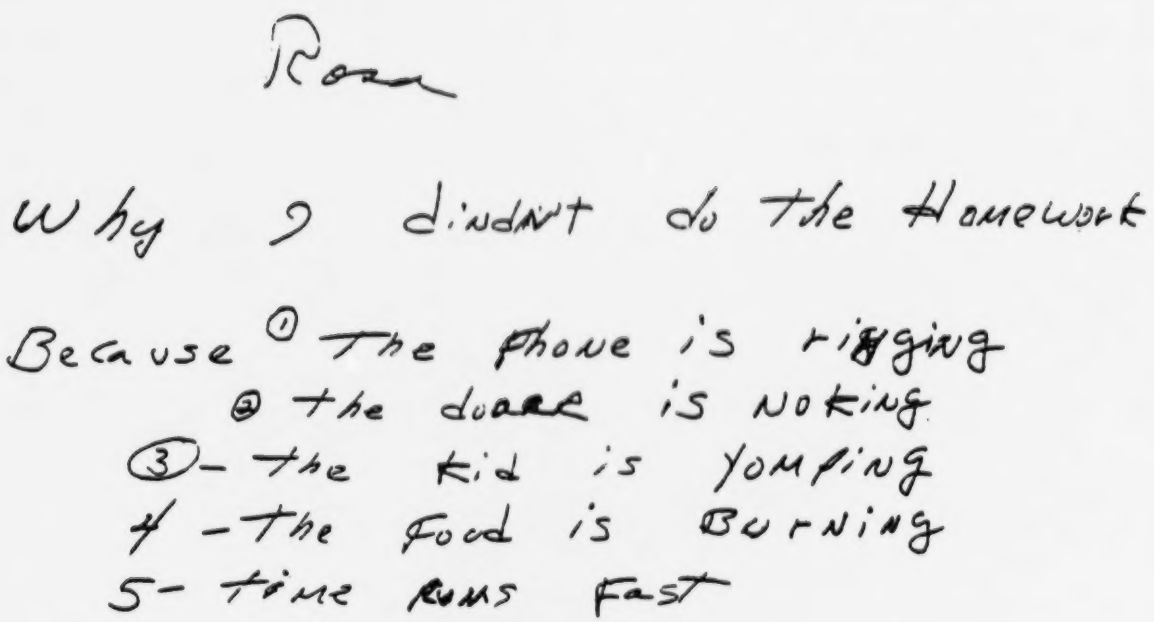
*A study of a Mexican-American community found that writing, schooling and social issues are intimately related in community life; when community concerns are introduced into the writing curriculum, they can be a powerful vehicle for literacy development. (Diaz, Moll & Mehan 1986)

*Adult literacy is most powerful when it is centered on critical themes derived from the social context of learner's lives. (Freire 1973)

*Starting with the culture-specific literacy practices and forms of language minority communities is a powerful way to engage parents in their own and their children's literacy development. (Ada 1987; Viola 1986)

*Non-mainstream literacy practices can be a powerful bridge to mainstream practices; students make significant gains in literacy development when they are engaged in investigating and reflecting on cultural differences in literacy use. (Heath 1983; Heath & Branscombe 1984)

One of our students, Rosa, composed two different pieces which, taken together, tell the story of the impact of these contrasting approaches to the social context. The first piece was written while Rosa was in a primarily grammar-based classroom taught by a teacher who was not part of the project but working with us. The teacher had assigned some homework exercises which none of the students had done; this is Rosa's response to the teacher's exasperated request for an explanation.


Rosa
Why I didn't do the Homework
Because ① The phone is ringing
② the door is Noking
③ - the kid is yomping
4 - The Food is Burning
5 - time runs Fast

Implicit in this piece is a plea for the teacher to understand the complex context of the student's life: she is more than a student - she is a parent, wife, cook, neighbor, and community member, trying to balance the demands of these many roles. Formal decontextualized homework becomes one more burden which seems in conflict with the demands of daily living. It doesn't always fit in or make sense.

The second piece was written by the same student when she was in a family literacy class where the teacher invited students to explore and write about the dynamics of language choice in their families, using the home context as content for writing.

"AT Home"

I Tolk to my Kids about School
I ask . c como se portaron ?
They say very good .
I Con Tinue in ask
about The Food... and the home work.
they Speak to me in english ....
I say I am Sorry .....
Yo no entendi nada; por favor hablame
en espaÑol . . . The older boy says ok..ok.
You study english you are supposed To
understand . They repeat again To me
Slowly and more clearly . yo les digo...
muchas gracias. . . . I love you .
They are 4, 6 and 10 years old.

Rosa. April 29, 1987.

In this case, where the content focuses on exactly the issues that the student is involved with in her daily life, the writing is rich and prolific. Here literacy no longer seems in opposition to the student's concerns but it is a tool for reflecting and acting on them. With these two pieces, Rosa's message here is clear: it is important to connect what happens inside the classroom with what happens outside the classroom so that literacy can become a tool for impacting students' lives. As a footnote to this story, when the teacher of the first, more traditional class began to change the focus of literacy work to issues from the students' lives (like problems with day care), she noted that the quantity of their writing doubled, motivation increased and quality improved as well.

Implications for Program Design

The following listing summarizes the implications of the ethnographic research in relation to the assumptions of the transmission model.

1) Home contexts: The studies suggest that it is not accurate to assume that immigrant and refugee famlies don't care about or engage in literacy practices in the home. Rather, there is evidence that ways of using literacy differ widely across and within classes and cultures and that it is these differences in a system which values mainstream 'ways with words' which at least partially account for differential achievement. Thus, ***it may be more productive to investigate home and school practices in order to build on existing strengths than to assume inadequacies.*** What this means for program designers is allowing community culture to inform literacy instruction rather than attempting to transform culturally diverse home contexts into sites for mainstream literacy interactions.

2) Parental roles: Investigations of the distribution of literacy skills in immigrant families indicates that a complex system of mutual support between parents and children characterizes the literacy interactions of many immigrant families. In this context, a model promoting unilateral parent-to-child literacy instruction and transfer of skills is neither realistic nor desirable because it does not reflect existing family practices. Instead, ***it may be more appropriate to investigate actual family dynamics, focusing on shared literacy (rather than transfer of skills) and facilitating parents' independent literacy development/use.***

3) Family contexts of successful readers: Ethnographic studies show that there are a range of factors and experiences which characterize the homes of successful readers; no single type of home practice in itself determines literacy development. In particular, there is no evidence that direct parental instruction in school-like literacy tasks accounts for success. Rather, a variety of interactions and multiple contexts for using literacy in meaningful ways are important. What counts is the extent to which literacy is integrated in socially significant ways into the ongoing activities of daily life. Thus, ***rather than emphasizing specific school-like activities, it may be more productive to work with parents to diversify the range of interactions and literacy-related experiences so that literacy can become a significant factor in addressing participants' day-to-day conerns.***

4) Language use in the home: Research indicates that emphasizing only the use and development of English literacy skills in the home may be a disservice to students. Since it is the quality of linguistic interaction between parents and children that is most important in supporting academic development, and parents can best negotiate meaning in their strongest language, they should be supported in doing so. Further, a solid basis of development in first language literacy proficiency, as well as positive attitudes toward the first language enhance second language literacy development. ***This evidence points to support for maintenance and use of the first language in the home, exploration of attitudes and perceptions about bilingualism, emphasis on the quality of interactions rather than their linguistic form, and support for development of first language literacy development when necessary.***

5) School vs. home factors: Both home and school factors, rather than primarily home factors account for literacy development. There is growing evidence that a reductionist subskills approach to literacy (emphasizing workbooks, filling in blanks, phonics and spelling) may discourage progress in reading and writing. To assume that what schools are doing is right and that parents should uncritically reinforce school practices at home may undermine the possibilities for organic family interactions of the type that families of successful readers engage in. Thus, ***programs should encourage parents to model and foster a holistic approach to literacy and at the same time become advocates working to challenge or change school practices if they are inadequate.***

6) The role of social context: The prevalent focus on parental inadequacies obscures examination of conditions which give rise to literacy problems. When concerns about housing, immigration, health or child care are seen as external obstacles, separate from and in the way of acquiring literacy, literacy work can become one more burden. When, on the other hand, literacy work is contextualized in terms of both the social issues and cultural practices of specific communities, there is evidence that literacy will become socially significant in family life. This suggests that ***the complex and often problematic social context of participants' lives should be seen as a rich resource for learning rather than an obstacle.***

Looking at the assumptions of the predominant model next to the evidence from ethnographic research, we see very divergent perspectives. On the one hand, the assumptions of the transmission model, taken together, paint a picture of family inadequacy. They feed into the current disease metaphor which suggests that there is a raging epidemic (*the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy)* and that this plague can only be eradicated or cured by enlightened social intervention which transforms parental behavior, skills and attitudes. Our fear is that this way of constructing the problem will contribute to a new version of the deficit hypothesis which blames marginalized people for their own marginalization. The danger of such an analysis is that it will drive away the very people it is designed to support because it focuses on weaknesses, prescribes solutions and evaluates them according to mainstream standards.

However, looking at the research findings, we see a very different picture with implications for program design that differ sharply from the kinds of practices listed on page 16. The picture painted by this alternative model is one that focuses on strengths, investigates family contexts, attitudes and practices with students, and explores possibilities for change with them. Rather than proceeding from the schools to the communities and families, it's direction is **from the families and communities to the schools**. It invites students to become critical readers of their own reality and authors of the changes they hope to make so that literacy can truly become socially significant in their lives. Since it is premised on the notion that literacy will become important for adult learners when it gives them a tool to deal with their daily reality, it has to be context-specific, grounded in the particular realities of each group of participants. This is why we call it a participatory approach to family literacy: it is based on a collaborative investigation of critical issues in family and community life; as these issues emerge, they are explored and transformed into content-based literacy work so that literacy can, in turn, become a tool for making change in the conditions of their lives.

So what is family literacy?

Emerging from this alternative approach is a new formulation of what counts as family literacy. This broadened definition includes but is not limited to the kind of direct parent-child literacy interactions that are frequently thought of as family literacy: reading with and/or listening to children read; talking about, giving and receiving support for homework and school concerns; doing other activities which involve literacy (cooking, writing notes, etc.). But just as important are the following:

1) **Adult family members working independently on reading and writing**: by developing their own literacy, parents are indirectly contributing to family literacy. As they become more independent, the burden shifts from the children and they are more free to pursue their own development.

2) **Using literacy to address family and community concerns**: dealing with issues like immigration, employment or housing through content-based literacy work enables literacy to become socially significant in parents' lives and by extension, models the use of literacy as a integral part of daily life for children.

3) **Addressing parents' childrearing concerns through family literacy class**: family literacy classes can provide a safe place for dialogue and mutual support where parents identify their own childrearing issues, share concerns and develop their own strategies for dealing with these issues.

4) **Supporting the development of the home language and culture**: as parents maintain and value the home language and culture, they build the foundation for their children's academic achievement, literacy development, positive self-concept and appreciation for their multicultural heritage; by valuing and building on parents' strengths, their status within the family is enhanced.

5) **Interacting with the school system on parents' terms**: family literacy classes can become a context for parents to address school-related concerns, developing the ability to understand and respond to them. They can explore attitudes to school experiences (both theirs and their children's). They can develop a critical understanding of schooling, evaluate and rehearse appropriate responses and develop networks for individual or group advocacy.

Chapter 2

WHAT IS A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT?

In order to frame your thinking about approaches to curriculum before reading this chapter, take fifteen minutes to write about a positive memory you have of a school experience. Then do the same for a negative school experience.

If you are working in a group, compare the experiences you wrote about:

**What do the positive experiences have in common?*

**What do the negative experiences have in common?*

**What key words/elements seem to characterize the positive/negative learning experiences?*

**What generalizations can you make about positive and negative learning experiences, environments and process?*

**What are their implications for teaching?*

What's your starting point?

Now take some time to answer the following questions about curriculum development in terms of your past experience and/or your current program. The purpose here is to articulate your current practice in order to begin thinking and talking about approaches to developing curriculum that you are already familiar with. If some of the questions seem ambiguous, talk about anything they make you think of (in other words, don't worry about what **we're** getting at - just bring out **your** own ideas). Again, this is exercise will serve as a backdrop or reference point for the chapter.

If you are working with a group, discuss your answers together: first describe what you do and then talk about how you feel about it (what you like or don't like about the process, advantages or disadvantages of doing things that way, and any concerns that have arisen out of this experience).

1. **How is needs assessment done?**
   Who does it?
   When is it done?
   If teachers are not involved, what information do they get about the assessment?
   On what basis are students placed in classes?

2. **How is the content of your curriculum determined?**
   Who decides what is to be covered?
   On what basis are topics, items, competencies, etc. selected?
   How is the syllabus structured?
   When is curriculum content determined?
   What is the role of each of the following in deciding content and shaping the syllabus? the funder, program administrator, teacher, students?

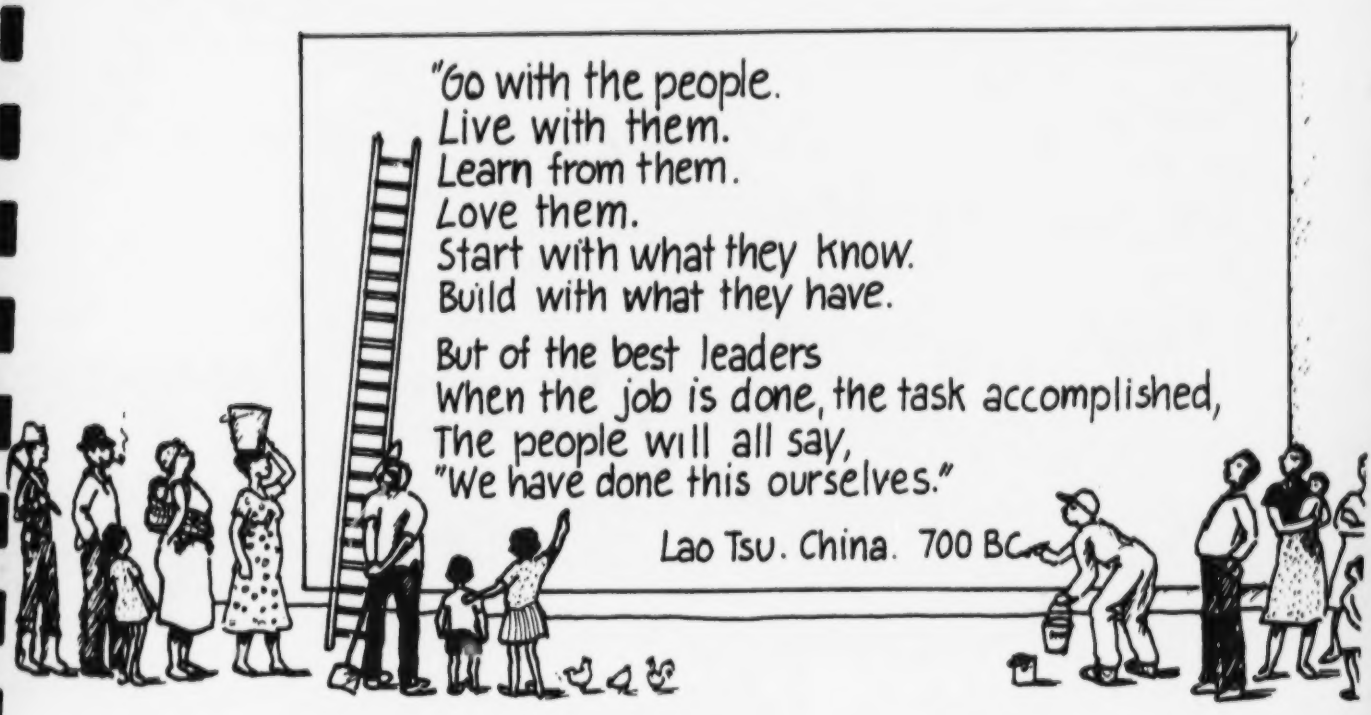
3. **How are classroom processes, activities and materials determined?**
   Who decides what students will do and how they will do it?
   What kinds of materials and activities are used?
   How are they selected or designed? When are they chosen?
   How are lessons planned?
   Is instruction mainly individual, small group or whole group?

4. **What is the teacher's role in the classroom?**
   What does he/she do before, during and after class?
   How do the students see the teacher?
   What does the teacher do about problems in class?
   What does the teacher do if the class gets side-tracked from the lesson?

5. **What is the students' role in the classroom?**
   To what extent do students decide how and what the class will study?
   To what extent do they select or create materials?
   What is their role in evaluation?

6. **How are the outcomes determined?**
   What kinds of outcomes are considered important?
   Who decides what possible/acceptable outcomes are?
   When are possible/acceptable outcomes specified?
   How is evaluation done?

7. **What are the goals of the program?**
   What would count as success?
   What are the funders' hopes for the students?
   What are the program administrators' hopes for the students?
   What are the teachers' hopes for the students?
   What are the students' hopes for themselves?


"Go with the people.
Live with them.
Learn from them.
Love them.
Start with what they know.
Build with what they have.
But of the best leaders
When the job is done, the task accomplished,
The people will all say,
"We have done this ourselves."
Lao Tsu. China. 700 BC

(Literacy Promoter's Handbook, SWAPO Literacy Campaign, 1987:6)

This graphic comes from the Literacy Promoter's Handbook, a guide for Namibian literacy workers. Although the quote was originally written almost three thousand years ago, and is taken here from materials being used in a third world setting, the message is a universal one, fully relevant to our work with immigrants and refugees in a North American context. The message is a simple one: **that people learn best when learning starts with what they already know, builds on their strengths, engages them in the learning process, and enables them to accomplish something they want to accomplish.** This is the essence of a participatory approach. The only thing astounding about this approach is that it is not the norm: in fact, it is diametrically opposed to the way that many of us have been taught, and, as the following pages (excerpted from the same manual) indicate, different from the 'old methods' used in many adult literacy settings.

As you read these next two pages, think about how each of the methods presented relates to your own learning and teaching experiences. *Which method is closest to the way you learned (what you wrote about at the beginning of this chapter)? Which is closest to teaching approaches you're familiar with?*

In the old method of teaching literacy, the teacher did all the talking. The learners listened and were not expected to participate very much, so often became bored.
The teacher was seen as superior and the source of all knowledge. Learners were treated as schoolchildren, merely repeating knowledge that was given to them - they were passive learners. They had no opportunity to make use of their own experience by participating creatively in the learning process.
Literacy was basically concerned with learning the alphabet. Adult learners are more interested in problems relating to their daily lives, and therefore often saw little relevance in just chanting "a b c d e."
abcd
efg
ih

(Literacy Promoter's Handbook, SWAPO Literacy Campaign, 1987:3)

In the new method, people learn to read and write while participating in group discussions about their everyday problems.
By looking into the causes of their problems and how to solve them, participants are encouraged to realise that they themselves can do something to improve their lives.
That tap is broken. We need to fix it.
But why is our water supply always breaking down?
That tap is always running dry. Then we suffer until it is fixed.
People learn initially to read and write those words which are most important to them. By taking time to understand their own lives, they are motivated to learn and escape from the feeling that nothing can be done.
This new method then, involves both literacy and community development skills.

(Literacy Promoter's Handbook, SWAPO Literacy Campaign, 1987:4)

These two pages depict dramatically different perspectives on **what literacy is, how it relates to the social context, how curriculum is developed, teachers' and students' roles, and the goals of literacy learning.** As these concepts are 'unpacked' in the following pages, think about how they relate to what you have said here about your own experiences as a learner/teacher.

An Emergent Curriculum

The evidence in Chapter 1 suggests that family literacy development depends in large part on the extent to which literacy is socially significant in family life. If literacy is to be meaningful for immigrant and refugee parents, it has to be centered on issues of importance to them. This means that curriculum content has to be tailored to each group of students - it can't be developed before the educator ever comes in contact with the class, but rather has to be built on the particular conditions, concerns and contributions of specific groups of participants at a particular point in time.

A host of factors shapes how each group's curriculum develops: Are participants from the same language group or different ones? Are they working or on welfare? What are the ages of their children? Do they live in public housing? The list goes on, but the point is that the educator can't know the specific concerns of any group until he/she comes in contact with them. There may be a set of generic issues - issues which are common and predictable for most immigrants and refugees in this country, but it isn't possible to know which of these will be 'hot' for any given group at a given point in time. The only way to find out what a particular group is concerned about, how they already use literacy and how they might use it in addressing these concerns is **to investigate the social context of their lives with them.**

But where does this leave the teacher? Clearly, this approach demands a fundamental reconceptualization of the traditional approach to curriculum development: we are used to a model in which the teacher walks into the classroom armed with a predetermined set of objectives or outcomes, syllabus, lesson plans and texts. Instead, in a participatory approach, the curriculum *emerges* as a result of an ongoing, collaborative investigation of critical themes in students' lives. This doesn't mean, however, that the teacher goes into the classroom empty-handed, waiting for issues to fall from the sky. **A participatory approach provides the educator with a structured process for developing context-specific curricula, involving students at every step of the way.** To implement this process, the educator needs four things: 1) a clear **conceptualization** of the rationale for the approach; 2) an **overview of the process** (an understanding of how to make it happen); 3) a set of **tools and procedures** for finding and developing student themes into literacy work; and 4) a set of **resources** to draw on in implementing the approach, including materials and co-workers to talk to about the process as it develops.

Rationale

The 'why' for participatory literacy comes from adult learning theory, second language acquisition theory and literacy theory.

Adult Learning Theory: The central concept in recent adult learning theory is **self-directed learning**. As Knowles (1984) and others have pointed out, adult education is most effective when it is experience-centered, related to learners' real needs and directed by learners themselves. Rather than abstract, decontextualized instruction focusing on isolated skills or generic topics, content must be contextualized in terms of student-determined interests and goals. It must be related in a meaningful way to the students' everyday reality and useful in enabling students to achieve their own purposes. Thus, adult learning theory supports the view that learners must be involved in determining both the content and direction of their education.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theory: This concern with context and meaning are reflected in SLA theory. In the past twenty years, there has been a paradigm shift away from grammar-based and behavioral approaches (both of which are form-centered in orientation) toward **meaning-centered** approaches to ESL instruction. Language is no longer seen only as a system of rules or behaviors which have an autonomous existence independent of their usage. The notion of **communicative competence** implies that it is not enough to know the grammar of a language; it is necessary also to know appropriate forms to use as the context changes. According to this perspective, both grammatical knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge are acquired in the process of meaningful interaction in a variety of settings, with a variety of purposes and participants. Purposeful communication, accompanied by appropriate feedback which subordinates form to the elaboration of meaning are key for language learning.

It is the teachers' task to create contexts for this type of communicative activity to take place. One of the means for creating such contexts is through **content-based** instruction: contexts which focus on the exchange and creation of substantive information provide opportunities to link language acquisition with cognitive development. Further, **cooperative learning through peer interaction** provides students with greater opportunity to use language than teacher-centered participant structures; in addition, task or problem-oriented activities provide a context for authentic dialogue and purposeful language use.

Literacy Theory: Central to recent developments in literacy theory is the notion that literacy practices, like language, are variable, context-dependent and culture-specific. Until recently, literacy was seen as a monolithic set of neutral skills existing independently of how or where they're used. Literacy was seen to have certain inherent qualities that inevitably led to higher order cognitive processing (e.g. logical thinking) and economic advancement.

However, studies of the real world uses of literacy and literacy acquisition in different settings have revealed that the ways people read and write vary according to the task, the situation, the purpose and the relationship between reader, writer and setting. Further, the particular practices and beliefs about literacy for a given society depend on a range of cultural, social and political factors. This research refutes claims made for literacy, showing that logical thinking is a consequence not of literacy per se but of how it is taught, (schooling); economic advancement is determined more by race, ethnicity and class than literacy level. Heath's (1983) work showed that while different communities use different literacy practices, those of middle class communities are most like those of schools and since authority is vested in those with mainstream ways, these children had an advantage. This advantage has more to do with power relationships than with any inherent qualities of their particular practices.

Street (1984) argues that it is no accident that literacy has traditionally been viewed as a unitary phenomenon, with inherent qualities and consequences. He argues that this view of literacy is a way of privileging one group's 'ways with words' over others. Recognizing only one culture-specific set of literacy practices, namely those taught and used in school (what he calls western essay-text literacy) and elevating it to universal status serves the function of maintaining the dominance of those who use it. Its status comes not from its inherent features, but from its relation to the social order, because of who owns and has access to it. Street, Heath and others argue that it must be explicitly acknowledged that each view of literacy reflects a particular ideological perspective: the traditional view justifies the status quo by valuing certain literacy practices over others; the socio-contextual view opens the door to changes in power relations by recognizing the legitimacy of diverse literacy practices.

A number of studies exploring the implications of this perspective for literacy instruction have appeared in the last several years (see for example, Heath 1983, Diaz, Moll and Mehan 1986).

Ethnographic approaches to literacy and literacy instruction: One way of countering the predominant autonomous mode while at the same time diversifying students' range of literacy practices is by involving them in the process of investigating language and literacy usage. Heath and Branscombe (1984) showed that when students become literacy researchers, exploring literacy beliefs and practices in their own families and communities, they make tremendous progress in their own literacy development. This study suggests that the process of observing, collecting, recording and analyzing data about language and literacy use in itself facilitates literacy acquisition because literacy is both the instrument and object of study. The following chart outlines features which characterize this approach.

What characterizes an ethnographic approach?

1. Creating a literate **classroom environment:**
   - -permeating the atmosphere with talk about language and literacy use
   - -constantly linking reading/writing to daily lives
   - -treating students as though they are avid readers/writers
   - -making the goals, process and reasons for them explicit

2. Making all literacy **classroom activities** real, student-centered, communicative (using literacy for real purposes and audiences):
   - -setting up letter writing teams
   - -starting with personal writing (autobiographical, student-initiated topics)
   - -moving to impersonal (writing about research)

3. Connecting **content** inside the the classroom to the community outside it:
   - -investigating language, literacy and variabilty of usage
   - -identifying contexts and purposes for literacy practices

4. Developing literate **practices** through research:
   - -collecting data: participant observation of speech situations, interviews, community reading inventories
   - -recording data: field notes, taping, transcribing
   - -analyzing data: finding patterns, comparing
   - -reporting on the analysis: presenting findings
   - -establishing a community of researchers for responding, criticizing, refining, producing a revised analysis

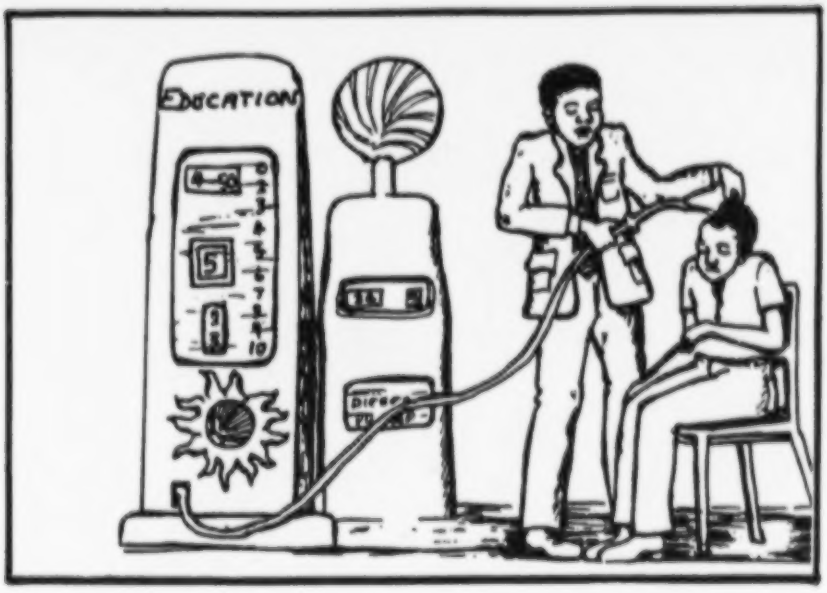
These recent theoretical developments suggest that instruction must include explicit discussion of literacy learning itself. This means 1) involving learners in the investigation of their own literacy practices, 2) critically analyzing with learners how the educational system has shaped their development, self-image and possibilities by devaluing their knowledge and promoting one culture-specific norm at the expense of others. 3) involving students in determining their own purposes, rather than prescribing practices for them.

Freire's approach to literacy and literacy instruction: The work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is perhaps the most important inspiration for a participatory approach to ESL. His approach, developed in the 1950's during a literacy campaign among peasants and slum-dwellers in Brazil, involved engaging learners in dialogue about key words representing problematic issues in their lives in order to foster critical analysis of the issues. These dialogues became the basis for literacy development and action for change.

What was significant about Freire's work was his insistence on linking literacy to its social context. As he says, reading the word and reading the world go hand in hand: literacy education is meaningful to the extent that it engages learners in reflecting on their relationship to the world they live in and provides them a means to shape that world. He claims that every curriculum reflects a particular view of the world, whether or not it is explicitly acknowledged. As such, education is never neutral: it can either serve to perpetuate existing social relations or to challenge them.

> Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration...into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the "practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Schaull in Freire 1970:15)

He argues that both the content and the processes of traditional adult literacy perpetuate the marginalization of learners. When literacy is taught as a collection of decontextualized, meaningless skills, starting with letters and sounds divorced from any significance in learners' lives, they cannot use their minds or bring anything to the learning process and as such become objects of instruction. Content in this model is often presented from an assistentialist, welfare mentality: students are seen to be devoid of the skills and behaviors needed to function in the society as it exists; the curriculum focuses on transferring knowledge which will help students 'fit in.' Freire calls this the banking model of education. Learners are seen as empty vessels, devoid of any knowledge and the educators' job is to fill the empty accounts by making deposits of knowledge. The learners thus become passive recipients of pre-packaged and pre-determined curriculum content. This process is disempowering in that it prepares learners for submissive roles in the larger social order. It is domesticating in that it tames people into uncritical acceptance of things as they are, discouraging them from actively challenging the forces that work to keep them marginalized.



(Hope, A. and S. Timmel, Training for Transformation, Book 1, 1984:9)

In contrast to this domesticating education, Freire proposes a model whose goal is to enable participants to become active participants in shaping their own realities. Both the content and processes of this model invite learners to become the subjects of their own education. Since content centers on problematic issues from their lives, literacy is immediately relevant and engaging. Since this reality is problematized (presented in all its complexity, without pre-determined solutions), participants become the creators rather than the recipients of knowledge. They engage in a process of reflection and dialogue, developing both an understanding of the root causes of the problem and generating their own alternatives for addressing it. Literacy learning becomes a context for thinking critically about social issues in a process which Freire calls *conscientization*. "Learners enter into the process of learning not by acquiring facts [skills, competencies] but by constructing their reality in social exchange with others" (Auerbach and Wallerstein 1987:1). This radically transforms their relation to education, making them subjects of their own learning; at the same time, because literacy becomes a tool for addressing problems, it transforms their relation to the world, making them subjects of their own history. As such, education becomes part of a liberating process rather than a domesticating one. The chart on the following page represents Freire's four part process for putting this theory into practice:

Overview of Freire's Curriculum Development Process

1) The listening phase: During this time, the educator immerses him/herself in the community of the students, becoming intimately familiar with their daily reality. Through this investigation process, he/she identifies critical issues from students' lives and selects a core group of issues which become the backbone of the literacy curriculum. The educator then distills these themes into codes or codifications - abstracted representations in graphic form of the issues, depicted so that they are depersonalized and objective but immediately recognizable. Problems are presented in a two-sided way so that no solution or pre-determined interpretation is implied. For each theme, a generative (key) word is selected which both reflects the loaded issue and has a regular syllable structure.

2) The dialogue phase: Learners in the culture circle reflect on the codes, guided by a facilitator/teacher who leads them through a process that moves from literal interpretation of the code, to linking it to personal conditions and situations, to reflecting on its root causes and considering alternative ways of addressing the problem. Through this conscientization process participants deepen their understanding of the conditions shaping their lives. The group nature of this process is critical: participants each contribute their interpretations and collectively arrive at an analysis of the situation; they share experiences and ideas in order to generate their own alternatives for action.

3) The decoding and recoding phase: Once students have 'read the world' of a generative word, they move on to **reading the word** itself, grappling with syllable structure, etc. The process moves from analyzing the word in terms of its meaning in participants' lives, to analyzing it linguistically, breaking it into syllables which are then recombined to make new words, using literacy to generate their own meanings.

4) The action phase: The final phase entails doing something in the real world as a result of the reflection and dialogue. In Freire's case, the literacy campaign led peasants and slum-dwellers to become active participants in the political process. On a less grandiose scale, the point of the action phase is to return to the problem that inspired the literacy work and work to change the conditions that gave rise to it.

Beyond Freire

For the past three decades, educators around the world have been working to put Freire's vision of "education for transformation" into practice. Although his work first developed in third world contexts, tied to movements for social change, and focused on first language literacy development in syllabically regular languages, it has been adapted for second language, workplace, health and peace education work internationally. The popular education and participatory research movements have both been influenced by Freire. His ideas have been widely adapted for ESL with the development of Wallerstein's (1983) problem-posing approach and the participatory ESL movement in Canada (see Barndt in Resources).

The challenge for anyone trying to apply a Freirean perspective is to figure out what is and what isn't relevant to a given situation. The brief summary outlined here is by no means a prescription for practice. As the body of Freire-inspired practice grows, there have been inevitable refinements, reformulations and challenges to both the form and content of Freire's ideas. Key among these is expansion of the learners' role in the curriculum development process: specifically, where Freire suggested that the educator undertake a period of investigation and identification of themes before instruction begins, others have moved toward a process of identifying themes through dialogue with participants, as part of the instructional process. In addition, rather than focusing on a single method (moving from code to dialogue to generative word to syllabification to creating new words and moving toward action), others have expanded the range of tools and processes for exploring issues, with student involvement in the production of material. Further, many have questioned the notion that the teacher's role is to facilitate conscientization and analytical thinking because it implies that the teacher has a more developed understanding than the students. The process of trying to redefine roles in the classroom has been as much a learning process for teacher-learners as for student-learners. The passage on the next page is an ABE teacher's explanation of how her thinking developed on this issue.

It is this accumulated body of practice which is the real inspiration for a participatory approach: while Freire's work is a starting point, the broadened perspective which has emerged through teachers sharing experiences in conferences, written accounts of their practice and informal networks is the essence of participatory education.

"Up to a year and a half ago, I was a teacher because I thought people needed to think more critically about the social conditioning of their personal experience, to look underneath the myths that obscure our vision of what's going on in our lives and the world...

But the problem this notion began to raise for me is that the women where I worked often did view reality with a critical consciousness; they quite often did see the social conditioning of their own lives. John Gwaltney, in Drylongso: A Self Portrait of Black America, said that "principled survival is a preeminently analytical process." A woman in one class once talked about how you have to lie to your caseworker to squeeze what you need out of welfare, but that having to lie in front of your children "takes away your freedom." Deciding which to trade off -- your right to demonstrate your real integrity to your child, or getting her a decent looking coat so she doesn't feel humiliated at school-- knowing that freedom is what hangs in the balance, is a "preeminently analytical process..."

When I first wrote the paragraph above, I wondered if I should take it out. I shouldn't have to remind myself that the women I work with think analytically. But I have to painfully admit that sometimes my eyes aren't open to it...

I also began to realize that within the framework I'd used, there wasn't a place for me, as a teacher, with which I was comfortable. The role it left me was that of a facilitator whose consciousness was already raised, helping other people to raise theirs. I was beginning to see that I couldn't reconcile that role with the reality of who the women in my classes really were. I also started to see how that premise didn't fit with the fact that my own awareness of many things still needed raising, or that even when my awareness of an issue is high, my actions don't always match it. In sum, I couldn't reconcile this role with the view I wanted to have of myself as a co-learner..."

Rachel Martin, Literacy from the Inside Out (1989:5-6)

COMPARING APPROACHES: The Ends-Means Approach

Perhaps the best way to explain a participatory approach to ESL literacy is to contrast it with the more familiar ends-means approach in which educators identify a body of knowledge to be covered during a specified time period (ends), assess student needs, and provide a plan (means) for meeting pre-determined objectives before instruction begins. Specifically:

The curriculum development process starts with experts identifying and describing a body of knowledge to be covered (as in the case of the Texas Adult Performance Level Study [APL] in which university-based researchers surveyed literacy usage in a wide variety of contexts, identifing sixty-five competencies which they claimed were necessary for 'successful functioning in society'). Very often this is done by consulting those in the mainstream society who will be interacting with the learner in order to determine their expectations for the learner (for example, employers or school personnel are asked what they need of the learner - what they hope or expect the learner to be able to do as a result of the classes). The results of the investigation process are then formulated into a syllabus or a bank from which to draw in determining the syllabus (thus, the APL Study became the basis for competency-based ESL).

Content in this view, derives from this externally defined body of knowledge (whether it be in the form of grammatical knowledge, language use, cultural information, life skills or competencies). This 'received' content is broken down into parts according to topic, function or form, with the resulting syllabus becoming a kind of blueprint or roadmap for instruction. The recent concern with accountability has led to very detailed specification of content, linguistic/behavioral tasks, outcomes and performance standards.

Needs assessment very often follows the formulation of the syllabus. Thus, it is done a priori, as a *precondition* to instruction to determine which skills students lack for the purposes of placement. In many cases, assessment is done by someone other than the teacher and results of the testing are presented to the teacher in numerical form, with no account of the interaction itself. As such, it informs instruction only to the extent that the score serves as a base-line against which progress is measured. In some cases (eg. competency-based ESL), teaching specifically targets weaknesses isolated by the pre-testing and disallows teaching not related to those needs.

The teachers' role in this process, is to transmit skills and knowledge; the **students' role** is to receive knowledge. As such, the teacher is the knower and the student is the knowee. Since learning is defined as the acquisition of skills/knowledge, it is seen to be primarily an individual process, with each learner proceeding at his/her own pace as he/she accumulates skills/knowledge with the assistance and direction of the teacher. While there may be flexibility in terms of materials or methods for attaining the pre-specified objectives, any classroom activity not directed at meeting these objectives is considered a deviation.

Outcomes are also measured against these pre-determined objectives. Teachers are evaluated in terms of how well they 'cover the syllabus.' Students are evaluated in terms of gains between pre- and post-testing of skills/competencies/levels. Great stress is placed on quantification of progress and objectivity of assessment. Further, outcomes must be correlated with objectives - this means that predictability is valued. Funding is often contingent on meeting goals which have been specified before students have been admitted. Thus, in a sense, outcomes (projected *results* of programs) shape recruitment (only those students who are likely to meet pre-determined outcomes are accepted).

In this approach, the educator/expert does most of the work of naming the reality, determining the needs and objectives, developing the educational plan, providing the materials, and evaluating the outcomes. As such, the classroom processes themselves rehearse students for roles of subservience outside the classroom. As Freire (1973:4) says, this kind of curriculum prepares students to adapt or assimilate to the existing social relations:

> Integration results from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality plus the critical capacity to make choices and transform that reality. To the extent that man loses his ability to make choices and is subjected to the choices of others, to the extent that his decisions are no longer his own because they result from external prescriptions, he is no longer integrated. Rather, he is adapted.

Freire argues that ultimately this is a disempowering process because the educator acts as a **problem-solver** for the student, 'curing' the student by prescribing or transmitting educational medicine (in the form of skills, behaviors, or competencies), with the result that the students voices are silenced.

Quite a literal example of this took place in an ESL class that I observed several years ago. This class took place in a factory cafeteria with a group of Portuguese women who had been in this country for many years. I arrived early, and found the women engaged in an animated and angry discussion of something that had happened to one of them that day: after eight years on the job, she had suddenly been shifted from an hourly rate job to a piece-rate job in violation of the union contract. The teacher, who herself was Portuguese, joined the discussion and this passionate debate ranged from why the boss had done this, to what the woman could do and how the others might help. Suddenly the teacher looked at her watch and said it was time to start class. She had prepared a lesson on calling in sick after a careful needs assessment of the kinds of language the women needed for the workplace. What followed was a solid hour of silence, with the women alternately looking out the window, at their shoes and at the clock. The women were subdued and their passion was gone; learning English had been pitted against addressing their reality.

This episode represents more than just missing a teachable moment. It represents a stance toward education. The teacher said that she felt she had to stick to her lesson - it was what she was 'supposed to do' and if she had 'allowed' the students to keep talking about what had happened at work, she would have been 'wasting time,' and 'cheating them'. She said she would have felt guilty and the students would have felt they weren't doing 'real' work. She was a caring and committed person who had spent long hours doing a needs assessment, identifying language skills her students needed to fit into the workplace and preparing detailed lesson plans to teach them the necessary skills step by step. But by making the decision for students, she assumed control of the situation, robbing them of the chance to participate in directing their own learning.

E. Auerbach

COMPARING APPROACHES: The Participatory Approach

Here teachers and students work together to decide what to focus on in class and how to proceed.

The curriculum development process involves students at every step of the way, from needs assessment through evaluation. Students are assumed to be the experts on their own reality and very much involved in researching that reality with teachers. This collaborative investigation of what is important to students is at the heart of the instructional process. As such, ***the direction of the process is from the students to the curriculum rather than from the curriculum to the students.*** In place of a static body of knowledge defined by outside experts, students and teachers have a set of principles and processes to guide their own selection of content and production of knowledge. Not only are students involved in deciding *what* is to be done, but they are involved in deciding *how* to do it: as they participate increasingly in creating and producing their own forms and materials (drawings, photos, drama, stories, music), they take more control of the learning process.

Learning is seen to be a collective process, where participants share and analyze experiences together in order to address concerns, relying on each others' strengths and resources rather than either addressing problems individually or relying on outside experts to solve them.

Needs Assessment is an ongoing process, *integrated into* classroom interaction rather than being a pre-condition to instruction. Of course, students are grouped according to certain criteria (which may include level, interests, language group, age of children, etc.). However, rather than being a base-line against which to assess progress in post-testing, ongoing needs analysis is seen as the basis for curriculum development: analyzing needs, interests, strengths and concerns is very much part of the process of acquiring control over one's own learning and as such an important part of the students' work. Since family literacy is seen as a social process shaped by a host of factors inside and outside the family (family roles, housing conditions, work, childcare, etc.), one of the important functions of the needs analysis is to engage students in examining their own contexts, identifying factors and dynamics that shape their environment so they can begin to change it.

Content in this process is emergent. Since there is no received body of knowledge to be covered or transmitted, students and teachers engage in a process of deciding for themselves what counts as knowledge. As Barndt (1986) says, students discover their own knowledge, create new knowledge and act on this knowledge. An important part of participatory curriculum development is transferring the tools for the production of knowledge to the students. This means they have to be involved not only in determining content but in explicitly reflecting on what counts as knowledge, how learning takes place and their own roles in the process. The 'bank' from which content is drawn is the social reality of students' lives: it may range from the very immediate context of the classroom itself to family and community contexts to broader political issues; it may include explicit discussion about literacy practices and literacy acquisition.

Choices about content are made collaboratively through "negotiated selection from these open-ended banks, guided by the curriculum principles..."(Candlin 1984:35). The syllabus, in this view, is more of a **retroactive account** than a blueprint or roadmap; **it is a syllabus of *how* rather than a syllabus of *what*** (Candlin 1984:33-35). As Candlin (1984:36) says, "It is only from the tension between classroom action and curriculum guidelines...that we can expect innovation. It is this tension which can drive curricula forward, maintaining their relevance to the society of the classroom and that of the world outside."

The teacher's role in this process is to act as a **problem-poser**, facilitating the process of uncovering important issues and reflecting on them, rather than as a transmittor of knowledge and skills. Because students are the experts on their own reality, the teacher is a **co-learner**. The teacher's stance is one of asking questions rather than providing answers; when he/she does answer questions it is in the spirit of sharing information as one of a group, rather than as the expert. Since the learning process is seen to be a collective, group process, the teacher's role is to draw out the participation, experience and perspective of group members so that they can use their collective knowledge to address issues. The teacher does this by creating a context where students feel comfortable in sharing what's important to them and structures for getting at these concerns, by re-presenting issues to students in a form that will facilitate dialogue, by helping to structure exploration of the issues, by modeling and presenting choices for learning activities and by sharing his/her own experiences, knowledge, ideas and opinions.

Outcomes cannot be predicted if content and processes are genuinely student-centered. The **unpredictability** of outcomes is valued in that it indicates participants have genuinely been involved in determining their objectives for themselves. As Stenhouse (cited in Candlin 1984:33) says, "Education as induction into knowledge is successful to the extent that it makes the behavioral outcomes of the students *unpredictable*." Thus, rather than feeling guilty about 'deviating' from the plan when unexpected issues surface, the teacher welcomes precisely this kind of occurence as the meat of a participatory process and is able to respond to it.

Further, in a participatory approach, **qualitative** change is given as much or more weight as quantitative change since the primary goal is that students move toward being able to address real life concerns and take action; this means that being able to describe and analyze changes is more important than being able to count them. Where measurable changes in skill or grade levels are valued in an ends/means approach, the diversification of uses of literacy and the ability to make literacy meaningful in everday life are valued in a participatory approach. These changes are not easily measurable and may have no clearly observable behavioral manifestations.

This means that **subjective** as well as objective evidence of progress is valued in a participatory approach. Since many of the changes are internal and affective, students' own assessment of accomplishment is important. As a result the notion of external objective evaluation is no longer sufficient; it is critical that students themselves be involved in the evaluation process both because of the value of the evidence they can provide and because their participation is a step in the process of gaining control of their learning and their lives.

Finally, progress is seen to be **cumulative** and cyclical rather than occuring in discrete, linear steps. Evidence of learning may not show up within a pre-specified time frame or at the moment it is being evaluated. It may take months after a class ends for its impact to manifest itself. Thus, in a participatory approach, there is no expectation that students will attain pre-determined objectives within mandated time periods. Rather, both language and literacy acquisition are allowed to develop at their own pace, without the attempt to collapse into a short time frame a process that takes first language/literacy learners years to accomplish. Rather than pre-determining expected levels of accomplishment by external standards, gains are described qualitatively with learner participation.

As in the ends-means approach, both the content and processes of a participatory classroom rehearse people for life roles; however, in this case, classroom relations prepare people for **changing social relations** outside the classroom, rather than for fitting into someone else's agenda. The transformation of student-teacher roles models changes in roles outside the classroom. As participants become actively involved in directing their own education, they explore and rehearse active participation in other areas of their lives.

These two approaches have very different implications in terms of family literacy curricula: an assimilative, ends-means approach would try to teach parents to conform to school expectations by extending school practices into the home, teaching about the American culture of schooling and modeling appropriate parental behavior. A critical, participatory approach, on the other hand, would explore existing parental concerns, expectations and practices, going on to evaluate and challenge school practices if necessary, and use literacy as a tool to impact these realities.

An example from one of our classes illustrates the difference between how assimilative literacy and critical literacy model and prepare students for life roles. One day a student brought to class a flyer from her daughter's school with a list of ways parents can help their children with homework. In an assimilative approach, the teacher might have gone over the flyer point by point, talking about what parents can do to help their kids. Instead, the teacher did something quite different. The class still read the flyer, but the reading was followed by questions like this: *Which of these things do you already do? Which would you like to do? Which do you think are ridiculous, impossible or not useful?* and *What do you already do that's not listed in the flyer?* This way of framing the reading led to a discussion of cultural differences in perceptions of teachers' vs. parents' roles (some critical cultural analysis); in addition, the parents identified both their own strengths (what they already do to help their children) and new things that they would like to try. By relating the flyer to their own reality, looking at it in a broader social context and exploring possibilities, they maintained a stance of independence and choice in the learning process; this simple prescriptive flyer became the basis for shaping some of their own alternatives.

So what is participatory curriculum development?

1) **Students are engaged in curriculum development at every stage of the process.** Ideally, this means that students participate in identifying issues, generating content, producing materials, determining outcomes and evaluating learning. Realizing this ideals is a slow, gradual process which involves moving back and forth between old and new ways of doing things and making the approach to curriculum itself explicit. Students' increasing participation fosters motivation, relevance and self-confidence.

2) **The classroom is a model: what happens inside the classroom shapes the possibilities outside the classroom.** Both *what* is learned (content) and *how* it is learned (processes) shape students' perceptions of their own possibilities and prepare them for particular ways of acting in the outside world. Classroom social relations are a microcosm of social relations beyond the classroom. Making changes inside the classroom itself models a way of addressing issues and redefining roles outside the classroom.

3) **The focus is on strengths, not inadequacies:** Students are seen as experts on their own reality, and, as such, invited to believe in themselves. The content stresses their capacity to create new knowledge rather than reproducing or duplicating someone else's knowledge. This means investigating, validating and extending what participants can (and want to) do rather than stressing what they can't do or imposing what educators/experts think they should be doing.

4) **The teacher's role is one of problem-poser rather than problem-solver**. The teacher is not the one with answers, but the one who facilitates students' discovery of their own answers. He/she catalyzes reflection on students' everyday reality. As concerns are identified, the teacher re-presents them to the class and guides students through an exploration process, contributing his/her linguistic expertise while learning from the students' about their reality. "Everyone teaches, everyone learns." (Arnold, Barndt and Burke, no date:16). The group generates its own ways of addressing concerns through collective dialogue.

5) **The content comes from the social context:** for literacy to be relevant, what goes on inside the classroom must relate to students' lives outside the classroom; thus, the starting point is the concrete experience of the learner. Students develop literacy by reading, writing and talking about social factors (like housing, work, or neighborhood safety) in their family/community contexts and, most importantly, ways that they can shape these conditions.

6) **Language, literacy and culture are explored as part of the content** since they are important aspects of the context. Through investigation of literacy use and cultural practices, learners develop metacognitive awareness of variations in form and function while also developing their own proficiency. Looking at who uses which language for what purposes, how literacy develops, and attitudes towards bilingualism promotes critical reflection on schooling and education.

7) **Content also comes from the immediate context of the classroom.** Since the students' primary shared context is their learning community, negotiating classroom dynamics and procedures are an important part of the content. By transforming these issues into content-based literacy activities, involving students in examining student-teacher roles, making decisions about curriculum content and processes, and resolving conflict, roles and social relations in the classroom can be redefined.

8) **Individual experience is linked to social analysis.** Participants look at their personal situations in light of each others' experiences and examine the root causes for problematic conditions. Thus, they not only talking about someone's difficulties finding an apartment, but why there is a housing shortage, why some landlords prefer to rent to immigrants and others prefer not to, as well as strategies for finding housing. This collective reflection de-personalizes problems, provides support, and is the basis for action.

9) **The content goes back to the social context.** The goal is action outside the classroom to address participants' concerns; content is meaningful to the extent that it enables learners to make changes in their lives. This means that reality is not seen as static or immutable; learners can do more than adapt to it. As such, literacy is not the end in itself, but rather a means for participants to shape reality, accomplishing their own goals. Thus, skills are taught in service of action for change rather than as independent, isolated objectives.

Chapter 3

GETTING STARTED: Program Structure

Now comes the hard part - making the leap from ideal to reality. The last chapter examined some of the theoretical underpinnings of a participatory approach, but there's always a tension between the real and the ideal. This was a tension we struggled with from the very beginning in our project. We had a clear idea of what we wanted to do in terms of drawing out students' issues, centering the curriculum around around them and making literacy more significant in their lives. But the first lesson that we learned was that no classroom takes place in a bubble: decisions which have been made before anyone ever enters the classroom shape what happens and what can happen. It's unrealistic to think that the way a participatory curriculum develops depends entirely on what happens once people have walked in the door. The issues, the content and the dynamics are determined by a whole host of factors that are intimately tied to the way programs and classes are structured.

This means that questions like when and where the class takes place, how the teacher is selected, what the teacher's working conditions are, how students are recruited and placed, how long the classes and cycles are, what has been said to students during intake and how all these decisions are made each influence curriculum development. All of this is in addition to student factors like which language/s students speak, how old they are, what their prior education has been, who is in their families, how old their children are, whether they are documented or undocumented, where they live, and perhaps most importantly, what their expectations. And we have to consider funders' expectations, colleagues' expectations, as well as the institutional context - what else is going on where classes take place and the norms and expectations they are embedded in.

In other words, we need to add another guiding principle to the list in Chapter 2: **the context shapes the possibilities.** It's not just the students' context that influences curriculum development in a participatory approach- it's also the context of the project itself. This means that there are ***always*** conditions over which we have little control - certain factors are ***given*** like funders' requirements, the language population in a certain neighborhood or school system. But there are also many points during the process of applying for funding and setting up programs where choices are made and it is important to realize that these choices will have significant consequences for how the classes develop. For example, will the proposal specify full or part-time teachers? Will the project be school-based or community-based? Will teachers be monolingual or bilingual? Will recruitment be targeted or open? Program structure and curriculum development cannot be divorced.

Since the essence of a participatory approach is that it is context-specific, geared to the conditions of each population of students in a particular time and place, and since we ourselves are still learning from our own experience, it doesn't make sense for us to promote a single program model for ***any*** context here. In other words, we can't tell you how to set up your program. For a program to work, it has to fit the circumstances where it is situated.

What we can do, though, is examine some of the factors that need to be taken into account in setting up programs (the implications of which we ourselves only realized retroactively in some cases). We will do this by presenting some of our experience in making choices about these factors and issues that emerged from these choices; then we'll try to generalize about the implications of various structural alternatives.

Despite the fact that the particular structure of any given program will depend on the circumstances (and we can't say it's always better to do X or Y), there is one exception: since choices are complex and need to be figured out in relation to the particular realities of each setting, it is ***always*** necessary to build in enough time, money and a process for collaborative decision-making among the staff. Staff development (or whatever you want to call this meeting time) is the key to effective practice: it is absolutely essential and worth every penny of funding it takes. **It is only through the dialogue and sharing of teachers' own insights and concerns that the leap can be made from research to practice.**

Brainstorming the possibilities

Again, before reading further, take some time to explore your own start-up ideas about program design. Ideally, this discussion should take place before the proposal is written and funding secured because in most cases, the mandates of the proposal dictate program design; once the proposal is written, you're pretty much bound to the design specified.

If you are setting up a program, respond in terms of possible options: discuss advantages and disadvantages of choices and possible implications for program implementation. If your program is already in progress, respond in terms of the existing structure and reactions you have to it. Why were choices made and what have their consequences been? What problems or contradictions have arisen as a result of these choices?

1. **The institutional context**
   - Who should be involved in finding funding, designing the project and writing the proposal?
   - Should it involve collaboration? If so, between whom?
   - Should the project be school-based/community-based/other?
   - What are the values and expectations of the institutions involved?
   - What are the mandates/constraints from funders that will shape program design? Are you uncomfortable with any of these? How might you address these concerns?

2. **Staffing**
   - How should staff be selected? Who should be involved in the selection process? What qualifications are important?
   - What will the staff positions be? Will roles and responsibilities be differentiated? If so, how?
   - Should staff be part-time/full-time?
   - What should the teaching load be? prep time? other?
   - How and when should staff development take place? What kind of training should there be? Who should be involved?

3. **Time**
   - How long will each cycle last?
   - How many hours per week of class time will there be?
   - What time/s of the day will classes take place?
   - How many cycles can students participate in?
   - Will enrollment be open/limited to certain times?

4. **Site/Location**
   Where should the program be housed? (school, library, housing project, literacy center, other?)
   How will the location impact participation?

5. **Learner population**
   What population will be targeted for participation? a single language group/multilingual? working/unemployed/welfare?
   How will 'family' be defined?
   Will the program include both adults and children/adults only?
   Will the program focus on mothers only/both parents/other?
   Will participants come from a single community or be open?

6. **Recruitment**
   How and where should recruitment take place?
   Who should be involved in it?
   Who should be targetted?
   What forms should it take?
   How will the project be presented (what will be said about it)?

7. **In-take**
   Who will do it?
   How will it be done? Individually/group?
   What will it entail? Interviews? Testing? What kind?
   How will information from in-take be used? Who will have access to it?

8. **Placement**
   On what basis will placements be made? level of ESL (oral/literacy)? level of first language literacy? interest? age of children? language group? other?
   Who will be involved in placing students?
   Will students be have any choices about placement?

9. **Support Services**
   What support services will be available? childcare? counseling? job placement? transportation? other?
   Are they existing/will they have to be set up for and funded by the project?
   How will different components of the program work together?

10. **Other factors?**

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Project Administration: Before our project even began, a number of structural choices were made implicitly that shaped the way it developed for the next three years. The original idea for our project came from the University. Once faculty decided to pursue the funding, they decided to invite collaboration with existing community-based adult literacy centers and the Adult Literacy Resource Institute. A meeting was called to see which centers would be interested in participating; three sites decided to work on the project. UMass faculty wrote the proposal with input from these groups. While there was collaboration at every point along the way, UMass served as the umbrella organization, receiving and distributing the funding, negotiating with funders, administering the program, and being responsible for implementation. This choice was made because it was logistically simpler than having several institutions jointly receive funding and we felt it would enhance our chances for favorable consideration. The size of the institution, its status as an institute of higher education, its history of administering grants, the grant-writing experience and professional qualifications of faculty members were seen to be advantageous in terms of securing funding which could be used to enhance the work of grass roots agencies.

Issue: ***What is collaboration?*** Despite the fact that we called ourselves a collaborative project, we had to figure out what this really meant along the way. Questions like *How are decisions about hiring teachers made? Whose agenda are we following?* and *How should budget decisions be made?* all had to be negotiated. Mutual trust had to be built over time because of both the general history of divergent agendas of universities and community groups and the particular history of the project.

Implications: The nature of collaboration is shaped by initial encounters, the proposal writing process, the funding mechanisms and administrative structures. If one group initiates the process and is formally identified as the umbrella organization, contacts with funders and logistical aspects of administration may be facilitated. However, if the collaboration is to be genuine, it is critical that this organization work actively to reflect the needs, build consensus, and insure involvement of each participating group in all decision-making. In any case, developing genuine collaboration is always *a process* that takes time and goes beyond formal agreements.

Community vs. School-Based Collaboration: Our project had no direct school linkage for a number of reasons: first, since one of the goals of the program was to help participants develop an independent and critical perspective on their children's education, it was important that they not feel constrained by the expectations of the school system. Second, we felt that students would be more comfortable in a 'neutral' setting, away from the sometimes negative associations they might have with schools because of their own or their children's experiences. The power relationships embedded in parent-teacher interactions might affect participants' ability to address their own issues. Third, we felt that recruitment would be facilitated by working with already established adult literacy centers, known and respected in their communities, with long waiting lists of students needing classes. Further, these sites already had support services as well as long as well-developed expertise in adult literacy practice. Finally, if the project were part of an ongoing program, there would be built-in opportunities for student advancement and a greater chance for the project to leave a legacy (impacting other teachers beyond the termination of funding).

Issue: ***How can we connect work with parents to children's schooling?*** Not having a specific linkage to children's schools made it difficult to assess the impact of the adults' classes on children's literacy. In addition, the range of participants' children's ages was so vast that it was more difficult to find common issues. Third, and most importantly, the lack of school linkages meant there was no organizational base for advocacy: the diversity of participants' contexts limited possibilities for taking action on school issues. This relates to the general need to have some common context in a participatory approach as a basis for action outside the classroom. As a result, we worked to develop alternative school linkages (for example, through parent groups).

Implications: Independence from schools may allow for a broader range of issues and facilitate the development of critical literacy among parents. However, having a specific school linkage may make it easier to focus curriculum content on issues of schooling and children's literacy, document the impact on children's progress, and develop an organizational base for advocacy. Thus, it is important to make a distinction between being <u>school-based</u> and having <u>school linkages</u>. Being school-based may constrain curriculum development but having some connection may enhance the possibilities for both having an impact as well as documenting it.

Dual Structure: In order to carry out the collaborative nature of our project, a dual structure was set up. The University secured and administered the grant; most of the implementation took place at the three sites. Staff were selected jointly but employed by the University. The teachers were based at the community centers, the coordinator at the University and the curriculum specialist somewhere in between, linking the teachers to each other and the project as a whole. Weekly staff meetings rotated between centers so that everyone was familiar with each others' workplaces and non-project teachers from the sites could come to open training sessions. In addition, teachers participated in all the functions of their centers as regular staff members. In order to facilitate the integration of the project into ongoing community program activities and ensure that they felt ownership in the project, the we followed existing program procedures and structures in terms of hiring, recruitment, placement and scheduling as much as possible. As a result, certain structural features of the program (like length and schedule of cycles, in-take procedures, and in some cases, course load) varied from site to site.

Issue: ***Is the project an extension of ongoing work or an independent entity?*** The dual structure of the project seemed at times like an advantage: it meant that the project was integrated organically into existing community-based literacy work. At other times, it has been a challenge to balance the needs of the project and the needs of the sites, which are not always the same. While we wanted to be sure that our work complemented what was already going in each center, serving the real needs of the programs/students, we also wanted to be sure that it was innovative and had an independent character. Teachers, in particular, felt the brunt of this tension, trying to balance site and project responsibilities or allegiances and decide how to allocate time and energy.

Implications: Communication is the key to integrating a new project with ongoing work at a site while maintaining its distinct character. There must be clear lines of communication between administrators and teachers as well as between teachers. To facilitate this, *project teachers must be recognized as official voices of the project since they are the primary link between collaborating institutions.* They must be involved in staff meetings so that they understand the constraints and conditions at the sites. Further, site staff at all levels must be involved in dialogue about the rationale and implications of the project so that they don't feel that outsiders or administrators are making decisions that affect their work.

STAFFING

Hiring: The hiring process was done collaboratively; the sites did the preliminary selection of candidates and the project coordinator represented the University in the final interviews. Each site followed its own established process in hiring. In some cases, students were involved in the interviews; in some, candidates were asked to teach a class. At two sites, the entire teaching staff participated in the decision-making; at another, the decision was made by an administrator. At one site, the project coordinator raised reservations about the finalist because the candidate didn't meet the requirements specified in the proposal. The process had not been formalized so there was some misunderstanding about how the final decision-making would take place. At another site, where the hiring was done only by the administrator, there was sometimes a sense of separation between the project teacher and others.

Issue: ***How can a participatory hiring process be insured while at the same time respecting the varying procedures of sites and the mandates of the grant?*** On the one hand, it is clear that broadening the selection process to include teachers and students is very much in keeping with a participatory approach. It is educational and motivating for students to participate in discussion about teaching qualifications and increases the chances that the person selected will be an effective teacher. It is important for teachers to participate in selecting their colleagues, both because they have a realistic sense of the job requirements and because it gives them the opportunity to learn more about the project. At the same, it would be intrusive to impose a participatory process at a site where it wasn't welcomed by adminstrators; in addition, if the results of the participatory selection process differed from the funding mandates, a conflict could arise.

Implications: Guidelines for the hiring process should be clearly articulated as part of the initial negotiations. The rationale for student and teacher participation should be part of these discussions as well as qualifications specified by funders. Wherever possible, involvement should be broad and participatory - so that hiring decisions are integrated into an instructional process.

Qualifications: Since proposals are viewed more favorably if staff have higher formal qualifications, we specified that teachers would have M.A.'s (as well as teaching experience) in our proposal. However, this created a contradiction since the success of a community-based literacy project depends largely on the teachers' ties to the communities of the learners: because of the constraints in the proposal, we resisted hiring a candidate who had a wealth of teaching experience, excellent references, was from the community of the learners and was herself an ESL speaker (but didn't have the degrees). However, subsequent experience confirmed that when teachers' life experiences are similar in some way to students,' the class has additional resources to draw on and possibilities are expanded. Another teacher with a similar background was able to pursue new issues and directions in her class because she shared students' language and culture, (as well as being a mother).

Issue: ***How do we weigh the importance of formal qualifications with informal qualifications (practical experience and ties to the communities of the learners)?*** On the one hand, it is necessary because of the way proposals are evaluated to specify advanced degrees; on the other hand, since the effectiveness of the work depends in large measure on trust and ability to relate to learners, the teachers' background is particularly important. These two demands, however, create a Catch 22: the reality is that since very little specialized education or training in adult ESL/literacy is available and salaries are relatively low, it is difficult to find bilingual/bicultural candidates with relevant advanced degrees. Those with certification have been trained to work with children (training which is often irrelevant or unsuited for work with adults) and can find better paying jobs in elementary/ secondary education. Those with relevant background/ experience are excluded because of lack of credentials.

Implications: While it would be advantageous to have staff with both advanced degrees and ties to the communities of the learners, this is not always possible. Thus, it is important not to exclude candidates with strong background factors solely on the basis of credentials and to recognize that there are ways of gaining knowledge other than formal education. As adult educators, we must advocate for broadening the definition of qualifications to include practical experience and relevant cultural background; these informal qualifications should be recognized in proposal evaluations.

Roles and Responsibilities: Our project started with a three-way differentiation of roles. The Project Coordinator was responsible for overseeing the work of the project, training, dissemination of information, and taking a leadership role. The curriculum specialist was responsible for coordinating curriculum development; working on special projects, and participating in dissemination of information. The teachers' primary work was in the classroom, developing and implementing the curriculum.

Issue: ***How can a project be participatory with a differentiation of roles?*** A number of tensions arose from this differentiation. Because the coordinator wasn't in the classroom, she sometimes came in with grandiose ideas about what teachers should be doing that didn't correspond to the realities of the classroom. Teachers insisted on determining the direction of their own classes, sometimes resisting the content of training being primarily shaped by the coordinator. To the extent that the coordinator was the main spokesperson for the project, teachers felt that their own voices weren't represented; at the same time, the coordinator felt divorced from the exciting work that was going on in the classrooms. Since a participatory approach is grounded in developing curriculum out of the particular context of a class, it wasn't always clear what the curriculum specialist's role was. The result was that we went through a process of redefining roles, with teachers developing their own forms for staff development, becoming increasingly involved in dissemination and establishing an independent voice in documentation. At the same time, however, teachers felt a tension between wanting to have a voice in all aspects of the work, but not having the time or inclination to do everything. We worked toward a sharing of decision-making and responsibilities with different staff members still focusing on certain areas.

Implications: Clear cut divisions in responsibility may impose hierarchical relationships and create a separation between theory and practice (if the coordinator has special status as expert, divorced from the reality of the classroom but in a position to influence its direction). If the essence of a participatory approach is context-specific learning, it's a contradiction to separate practitioners' work from curriculum development or training. On the other hand, it's neither efficient nor possible for everyone to do everything. What makes sense is a non-hierarchical structure where participants' work overlaps (but doesn't require everyone to do everything), decisions are made together and expertise is developed collaboratively.

Teacher Workload: Teachers in our project were full-time, with benefits including, medical insurance, vacation time, etc. Each teacher taught two levels of classes, and in some cases also opted to teach additional elective courses. Their other responsibilities included curriculum development, dissemination, training, participation in site and project meetings, and other site responsibilities (in-take, assessment, evaluation, etc.). This paid time for preparation, professional development and non-teaching activities was the single most important factor in their ability to be effective as teachers, develop innovative curricula and contribute to the the field of adult ESL literacy. They have been invited to present their work at local and national conferences, to do trainings around the state and to act as consultants for other adult literacy programs.

Issue: ***How can programs balance the need to be cost-effective with the need for quality teaching?*** In order to get funding, programs need to serve as many people as possible, for as little money as possible; consequently teachers are often hired on a part time basis or given heavy course loads. Further, the salary range in adult education is considerably lower than for other sectors of public education. The result is that teachers often run from job to job, burn out quickly, have no time for innovation and leave the field after a few years. When we met other Family Literacy teachers at conferences, they often told us that they taught a few classes at night in addition to other jobs, and had little time to prepare or even think about curriculum issues. Their family literacy classes were often no different from other ESL classes. They rarely met with colleagues to discuss common concerns or share teaching strategies. In our case, it was precisely because teachers had paid time to read, write and talk about their work (their roles were defined beyond merely "delivering services") that they were able to be effective inside the classroom and contribute to the development of the field.

Implications: The choice between quality full-time teaching and cost-effectiveness is a false choice: in order for a program be effective and for the field of adult literacy to develop, teachers must be treated as professionals, supported in terms of salary, working conditions and intellectual development. It is the teachers who are at the forefront of the struggle in adult literacy and it is only when they are recognized, given paid time to meet with each other, to reflect on and document their practice that the delivery of services will improve and the battle will move forward. Teaching cannot be divorced from professional development.

Training: Our project started with a traditional training model in which the coordinator was responsible for selecting topics, designing the syllabus and conducting the trainings. As coordinator, I came to early staff meetings with a plan for each session, and began by presenting information, suggesting readings and trying to lead discussions. Very soon, it became clear that this wasn't working: teachers felt that the readings had little relation to the realities of their classrooms.

Issue: ***How can training address the tension between expanding teachers' knowledge base and responding to practical issues and classroom realities?*** While I was trying to create a theoretical and conceptual framework for the project, teachers were immersed in issues like, "How can I find out what students are interested in if we don't share a common language?" They needed time to talk about issues arising from their practice and for this, they were each others' best resources; my input was valid but no more important than theirs. In other words, the training needed to be driven by their practice, rather than their practice driven by the training. Nevertheless, I was concerned that they weren't getting information they needed from the knowledge base from research and professional literature I had access to. I continued to suggest readings or topics; very often, when it came time to discuss them, the teachers, like Rosa (page30) hadn't done their 'homework'. But, like Rosa, when the 'homework' emerged out of one of *their* concerns, and they felt a need for a particular kind of external resource, they became engaged. In other words, when their learning was self-directed, arising out of their own needs, it was most useful. I had to let go of the idea that, as the trainer, I was responsible for shaping their learning based on what *I* thought was important, and to stop feeling guilty if we deviated from the agenda. The model we arrived at drew on both our own and outside resources. Its central component was **teacher-sharing** (described in chapter 4 as the core of curriculum development); we also had workshops on a variety of topics chosen by the teachers.

Implications: Training, like teaching, is most effective when it is participatory. It needs to be ongoing and contextualized, emerging out of the real issues and questions teachers are facing. This means redefining expertise so that teachers' experience and role in constructing knowledge counts. We need to move toward an "everyone teaches, everyone learns" model in our own work as well as in our work with students.

TIME

Length of cycles and duration of classes were determined on a site-by-site basis in our project. There were three cycles per year of about twelve weeks each, with four to twelve hours per week of instructional time for each student. Working students preferred night classes that met four hours a week; for non-working students with school-age children, daytime classes with several hours of instruction per day seemed better. Of course, classes that met most often were better able to develop the participatory process; the momentum around an issue can be lost if there is too much time between classes. Some students stayed in a family literacy class for one cycle before moving on; others stayed for up to two years. Because levels were low, it took time to develop students' proficiency to the point where they could go on. In addition, they often didn't want to leave the class because it provided a supportive context for learning, focused on issues that were meaningful, and developed their sense of self-confidence. At the same time, however, there were long waiting lists of students in need of classes.

Issue: ***How can we both serve the growing number of students and provide adequate learning time and continuity of instruction?*** While initial literacy acquisition takes years for children, it is often expected that non-literate adults will acquire similar levels of competence (in a second language!) in a fraction of the time. The rate of progress depends to a large extent on the student's starting point. Yet, in the interests of efficiency and access, funders limit the time that students can stay in programs, favor projects that claim to achieve the biggest gains in the shortest time, and make funding contingent on mandated levels of progress. As a result, the least literate students are either excluded altogether because it takes longer to show progress or are cycled out quickly to increase the numbers. This has the effect of maintaining the low level of the least literate students.

Implications: Beyond advocating for more funding to accomodate the growing number of students, we need to challenge the notion that it is always better to exit students from classes as quickly as possible. Rather, we need to provide a range of time options for students that take into account work/family schedules as well as educational needs. Decisions about timing should be left up to the judgement of educators rather than being mandated by funders.

Should we give students as much time as possible or move them along as quickly as we can?

The following passages are excerpts from the project minutes where we reflected on this question and its implications for students.

"Teachers were concerned about numbers. Will we have to cycle students out of our classes as quickly as possible to meet the 150 students/year goal? What if some students need more time? Teachers were concerned that, given the student population (with very low skill levels), there be a conscious policy of retaining students as long as necessary to really show progress. Since this project is one of the few that meets the very real need of serving students who are far from being employable or moving to GED (in a state climate of funding only employment-related ESL), it is important that we not try to move students through quickly, but rather, keep them long enough to ensure substantial progress. There is a trade-off: numbers may be lower, but the quality and effectiveness of instruction will be enhanced."

2/4/87

"Charo now has almost all new students in her upper level class because everyone else went on to a higher level; one even went to level 3. She feels mixed about this because it means that the support community for the students is disrupted; there's a certain way of doing things and sense of community which was established that helped students in her class learn and she has mixed feelings about letting go of this. Madeline also talked about this dilemma of feeling the students need to maintain their learning community but also need to progress to other levels."

2/4/89

LEARNER POPULATION

Definition of Family: Family literacy programs are designed to target parents of bilingual children so that they can support their children's literacy development. But the concept of nuclear family (the parent-child unit), doesn't always fit the reality of immigrants' and refugees' living situations. Within their own cultures, family units include much wider circles of relationships; in addition, many refugee and immigrant families have been torn apart by the traumas of war and migration. Children often have been left behind or live with unrelated caregivers. Even finding out about students' family situations can be a painful and loaded process (given that family status is used to determine documentation, benefits, etc.). We decided to be as inclusive as possible in our definition of family, rather than limiting classes to those who fit one culture-specific notion of family. This meant enrolling grandparents, aunts, uncles and sometimes unrelated caregivers (rather than only biological parents) in our classes.

Issue: ***How can family literacy projects fulfill their mandate without imposing a culture-specific notion of family?*** On the other hand, how can we call ourselves a family literacy project if we define *family* so broadly? If we limit family literacy classes to parents of bilingual students, we miss important segments of the relevant population; but if we broaden our definition to correspond to the reality of bilingual children's lives, we may be diluting the focus of the work (because of the range of interests and issues of participants). This dilemma ceases to be a contradiction, however, if we keep in mind the idea that family literacy means more than narrow didactic encounters between parent and child. In our own project, when we grasped the concept that the essence of family literacy is making literacy socially significant in family life, we were able to stop worrying about not focusing enough on parent-child literacy work.

Implications: If a project wants to specifically foster parent-child interactions around literacy, it is helpful to limit the target population. However, if the goal is to enhance the importance of literacy in immigrant/refugee children's home life, it makes sense to define *family* broadly to include the significant people (related or unrelated) in children's living situation as the target population.

WHAT'S A FAMILY?

The following passages are excerpts from the minutes of our meetings where we discussed this issue and its implications for the curriculum.

"In Anglo culture, family is often defined as the nuclear family. For our students, however, families may include several generations - the extended family may even include people not related by blood. It's important to be conscious of not imposing our own definitions of family, because very often our ways of modeling terms dictates how students define their own situations. For example, in one case (not in this project), a tutor introduced only her nuclear family to students; students followed this model in talking about their own families until the tutor introduced her own extended family of fifty or more people with a photo. We need as well to be conscious of the the questions we ask about families; by asking "Where is your family?" or "Where is X?" we may invite students to talk about family members still in the home country, whereas, without this type of question, they may only talk about families in terms of people with them in the U.S.?"

"But how much should we talk about families anyway? For many students and teachers, family related issues are extremely loaded. Death, separation from loved ones and imprisonment are common realities for our students. It's hard for students to talk about these issues. This presents a dilemma for us. We're funded to address family literacy issues (but students may be uncomfortable about dealing with them) and we are a participatory project based on the premise that learning must start with issues that *students* want to talk about. Our role as teachers is to find students' issues rather than impose ones which we have selected. So how do we center the curriculum on *family* if that's not what students want to do?

Teachers addressed this dilemma in two ways: First they stressed that one never knows, as a teacher, when loaded issues will arise in the course of classroom interaction. The most seemingly inocuous topic (food) can raise heavy issues for students. So, in a way, it's impossible to steer away from issues because they may be too threatening or personal for students. The other aspect of this is that we must avoid a narrow focus on family issues if we define family literacy issues as any issues which impact on the family literacy environment, including things like employment, child care, housing, etc. We need to intersperse family-centered content with catalysts for getting at other issues and with lighter, more traditional activities."

Adult only vs. parent-child classes: Given our broadened definitions of family and family literacy, we set our classes up as adult-only classes in order to allow for the development of a diversity of literacy issues and topics. In one case, however, all the participants were mothers and several had no childcare. They asked if they could bring their children to class. The class was set up so that one section had a rug, toys and books for the children. The sessions continued to focus on work with the mothers, but often the children sat with them, imitated what they were doing or joined in. In this way, the children rehearsed many of the literacy practices their mothers were engaged in. Some of the time, the mothers did literacy activities with the children. In another site, an unsuccessful attempt was made to set up a parent-child class in a housing project: the class was advertised as a place to learn to help children with homework and reading. Too few people signed up to start the class.

Issue: ***Should family literacy classes include children or focus on work with parents?*** What seemed to make the parent-child set-up work in our class was the fact that it developed organically out of the participants' needs, rather than being imposed from the outside. Where in the housing project class, the focus was determined by its organizers, in the other, it was determined by the parents themselves; it seems that this difference might account for the differential participation (although this is speculation!).

Implications: Our sense is that the form that classes take should grow out of the parents'/adults' needs and interests and that participants should be involved in decisions about whether or not to include children. As we discuss in the section on recruitment, it is important to make the option of focusing on work with children explicit, but it is equally important to leave it as one option among others. Given the fact children's proficiency is often more developed than parents' in immigrant families, many parents want the chance to work on their own literacy acquisition, independently of children, for their own purposes.

Should we create contexts for parents and children to work together on literacy?

The following excerpts from our minutes show different perspectives on this question suggesting that the answer depends on the context - who the children are, their ages, their own levels of development and length of time in the U.S.

"Some parents mentioned that their children don't have the time or the patience to help them with their homework. For one family this is a dilemma: the kids go to Greek school after school which is important to the parents, but leaves little time for the kids to help the parents. One student married to an American has begun to do his work independently, without family help which he sees as a step forward. "

3/87

"Loren's class is focusing on school-related work, examining students' own educational background and views about schooling. As the link is made with children's education, what seems to be emerging is an interest in teenagers issues: dealing with drugs, sex, etc. rather than reading with kids; what's appropriate for this group is different than what would be appropriate for parents of younger children. They seem to be more interested in dealing with parent-child issues as the <u>content</u> for their own literacy activities rather than family literacy <u>processes</u> (like doing literacy activities with kids)."

1/88

"In Charo's mothers and children class, the mothers have begun to spontaneously read to kids and work alongside them. Each class starts with a ritual of interacting with the kids. When the parents start doing their own work, very often the kids ask for the work their parents are doing. Even the little kids scribble on worksheets their parents are doing - and the scribbles are in the right places, on the lines. Charo feels that this model of not separating childcare from the classroom is beneficial for the whole family - learning becomes fun for the children and a connection between parent and child."

4/89

"Alicia used Ann's interview lesson about life journeys with two of her classes. What struck her was the answers from the lower group were more interesting. This group is composed of different nationalities so there seemed to be more of an exchange of information."

10/87

"Charo has a class that's all women. The group dynamics are completely different. People seem more relaxed and open. Issues are coming out more easily and there's a lot more laughter."

1/89

Open vs. monolithic groupings: We decided early in our project that we would take students as they came, attempting to meet their needs, rather than establishing rigid entry criteria to simplify our work, ensure monolithic classes and facilitate implementation (turning away students who didn't narrowly fit pre-determined qualifications). In some cases, this meant that classes were multilingual, while in others they came from a single language group. Some classes had mothers or women only while others were mixed. In some, levels were quite mixed, while in others they were similar. Class make-up was influenced by how recruitment was done and where classes were located.

Issue: ***How do we balance the benefits of monolithic vs. diverse classes?*** In our experience, diversity among students had several advantages: students had a real need to use English to communicate with each other; there was peer learning and a lively exchange of perspectives; and the range of issues was broad. Students were often amazed and moved by each others' histories which allowed them to see their own experiences in new light. At the same time, however, diversity imposed limitations, making it difficult to meet individual needs and find themes that everyone wanted to pursue. In one class, students of different nationalities, ages, and educational backgrounds worked together for two years exploring this diversity as a strength and then chose to go in different directions to meet individual needs. In single language classes, it was easier to identify common issues, and build on first language literacy skills; however, it sometimes was difficult to sustain use of English. Classes with women only seemed more open, with a greater sense of ease in raising issues from participants' lives.

Implications: There is a richness in diversity that allows students to see their own experience in a broader perspective, learn from each other and use language as bridge between cultures; at the same time, however, being too open can be counterproductive, impeding the participatory process. Since participatory education aims to link what happens inside class to action for change outside class, it is important that students share a context in which to take action. If students come from the same housing project, language background, workplace or neighborhood, if they are all women/ mothers, if their children are similar in age or go to the same school, it will be easier to find common issues and to develop an organizational basis for acting on them. It matters less *what* the unifying framework is than *that* there be one.

Location: Our classes were physically located at four places: most were at adult learning centers, one was in a public housing project, one was in an apartment complex and one was in a library. None were in public schools because of our concern about possible negative associations with schools (another family literacy program in the Boston area had done recruitment through the schools and met with some resistance). There were two criteria for selecting locations: convenience and impact on participation. What we found was that **who participates and how the curriculum develops are influenced by the place a class meets.** For example, although availability of space was the reason for meeting in the library, that class was able to develop familiarity with library use and resources in a way that others couldn't. When one of our teachers started a class in a Hispanic apartment complex, students with literacy levels much lower than those who came to the center for classes began to participate.

Issue: ***Should students come to us or should we go to them?*** It is often more convenient to centralize classes in one location; it facilitates logistics (like xeroxing), and means teachers don't have to travel around transporting books and materials. However, in adult literacy *turf* is a critical issue for students, partly because of transporation (cost, distance, time, etc.), partly because of effort (it's harder for students to mobilize themselves to do something difficult if they have to travel to an alien place), but mostly because of comfort. Students with little prior education often feel like strangers in school settings. If they are on their own turf, there is one less reason for apprehension about learning. In addition, issues of importance will emerge more readily in an atmosphere where students feel a sense of ownership. Since content comes from the social context in a participatory approach, it is easier to find common issues if the students come from and work in an immediate shared context: issues relating to the community of the housing project are more likely to become content if classes take place there.

Implications: There is a strong connection between where classes are located, who will come and how they will develop. It is critical to become familiar enough with the learners' community to know the significance of different places in their lives. This means being willing to be flexible and, if necessary, moving the location as you learn more about the community. **Sometimes you have to go to students instead of expecting them to come to you.**

Recruitment: How students are recruited and what they are told about the project will influence curriculum development. An informal survey at one of the sites indicated that most students hear about classes by word of mouth (rather than formal publicity); they come because someone they trust told them about it rather than because they read a flyer (which many can't do anyway). Since the literacy centers in our project usually had long waiting lists, we did not do special recruitment, but selected appropriate students from their lists; participants often did not know they were part of a special project and did not explicitly choose to participate. However, in some cases, special outreach may be necessary: one teacher discovered a group of students who came to her site for social services but didn't sign up for ESL because they were illiterate in Spanish (they signed forms with an X) and were intimidated by the idea of school; thus, there was a built-in referral connection right at the site that hadn't been tapped. Another center decided to offer an additional family literacy class, publicizing it as a class for parents interested in helping their children with reading, homework, etc. but too few people signed up to run the class.

Issue: ***Should recruitment be general or targeted?*** The disadvantage of non-targeted recruitment is that students may not see their family literacy classes as any different from general adult ESL classes, making it difficult to focus on issues relating to children's literacy. At the same time, however, adults may not want to come to classes that focus only on family-related issues: they may have a much broader range of interests.This may be why the class for parents never got off the ground: its focus was too narrow.

Implications: A balance needs to be struck between making the family focus explicit and not limiting classes to that focus. To do this, there needs to be both targeted recruitment and some self-selection by students. Advertising as a family literacy class may not attract students; personal (bilingual) contact is important. Once potential participants have been identified (through schools, day care centers, social service agencies, etc.), they should be given the option of joining a family literacy class as well as information on which to base their choice (rather than just calling it a family literacy class, limiting its work to family issues and hoping students choose it). Since the term *family literacy* may be unfamiliar, students should be asked if they would like to join a class which focuses on their concerns about their children's reading, schoolwork, and schooling *as well as other issues of concern to them.*

In-take: Since in-take was done according to the procedures of each center, we were able to compare different models. The sites varied in terms of why it was done (rationale), what it consisted of (content), how it was done (process/tone), and who did it. In one site, in-take was done by counselors who got information about students' life situations, did a formal assessment, and passed test scores to an administrator who used them for placement. Results were shared neither with students nor teachers (who were just handed a class list). About one fourth of the students were inappropriately placed, assessment was divorced from instruction and the in-take did not reflect the pedagogical approach. At another site, in-take was done by teachers using an informal interview process; a range of factors were considered for placement, including level, interests, and group cohesiveness. Teachers shared information from the intake process with each other so it could be used to inform curriculum development.

Issue: ***How can in-take be both participatory and efficient?*** Very often in the interests of streamlining placements, in-take is done according to the first of the above models. While the initial process may be facilitated long-term consequences may be negative. In-take is critical as the students' first encounter with a program. It sends them messages about themselves, about what education is and about what literacy is. For low level students, testing can be a threatening ordeal which reinforces feelings of inadequacy. Not sharing results makes them objects of an alien process, reinforcing a sense of powerlessness. Tests that emphasize matching sounds to symbols, reading word lists or street signs, or filling out forms send the message that literacy is a set of skills, either decontextualized or limited to functional purposes (rather than a way to make sense of or change one's life). On the other hand, if in-take allows students to show what they know, express their interests, and begin to explore their own literacy uses and purposes, they get a sense of directing their own learning. Teachers are in the best position to carry out this type of interview efficiently (without it being too cumbersome or time-consuming) since they can interpret subjective information in interviews.

Implications: Teachers should be involved developing and carrying out in-take since they are best able to link in-take procedures to a learner-centered pedagogy, interpret and share results, place students in appropriate classes and utilize information to inform curriculum development.

GUIDELINES FOR IN-TAKE[1]

Why: In-take should be conceptualized as a two-way process in which students and staff are introduced to each other. Its purpose is not just to expedite placement, but also to get a sense of what students can and want to do, put them at ease and set the tone for learning. As such, the process must reflect a participatory approach, emphasizing students' strengths by giving them plenty of opportunity to demonstrate what they can do (not just what they can't do); it must be genuinely communicative and interactive.

What: The content of placement tests and in-take interviews send a message to students about what literacy and language are. If tests stress decontextualized word lists, sound-symbol correspondences and filling out forms, they send the message that literacy is a mechanical process, divorced from any meaningful relationship to students' lives. If, on the other hand, a range of text types, formats and tasks are included, with interesting, semantically whole texts that are relevant to students' lives and allow for student input, a more organic, wholistic view of literacy is projected. Students should be able to respond to a selection of graphics, forms, and excerpts from authentic texts (newspapers/literature/school materials, children's books, etc.) representing real uses for literacy and language.

How: The format of in-take also sends a message to students about how they are viewed as learners. There is an implicit power differential between students and staff which the in-take process can either reinforce or challenge. It is important that the interview not be a rigidly controlled, lock-step procedure which sticks to a pre-determined format and gives students the sense that they are being judged. Rather, students must be given a sense of control and choice: they should be invited to select which items they want to respond to and how they want to respond. For example, they might be presented with a few short passages of varying content, difficulty (in either English or their first language) and asked which they would like to read; questions should relate the readings to the students' lives; students should be given options in responding (L1 or English, orally/writing). Display questions (where the interviewer already knows the answer and is testing the students' knowledge) should be avoided in favor of real questions (where the student is providing new information to the interviewer). Oral interview questions should be seen as guidelines rather than prescriptions; interviewers should have the flexibility to pursue topics of interest that come up and deviate from the format in the interests of genuine communication. Invasive questions (like "Do you work?", "Where do you work?" and "How many people live in your house?") should be avoided since students may wonder whether this information will be used against them as it often is by authorities, thus immediately putting them on the defensive. Students should have time to ask questions about the program.

Who: Teachers should be involved in in-take wherever possible. It is difficult to accurately gauge language level and appropriate placement solely through quantitative, 'objective' measures; the subjective judgement necessary for accurate assessment requires the professional skill of teachers. In addition, teacher participation in in-take insures that students' questions can be appropriately answered and that information gathered through in-take can inform curriculum development. Ideally, a bilingual teacher or teacher-bilingual aide team can do in-take, allowing for the possibility of assessing first language literacy abilities, use of L1 in directions, oral interviews and literacy tasks. If this is not possible, substantive information gathered in in-take should be made available to teachers so it can be used for placement and curriculum development.

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[1] Chapter 8 presents ideas for specific in-take assessment procedures.

Orientation: We also had the opportunity to compare approaches to orientation as one site experimented with two different models during the course of the project. In the first model, the Director welcomed students and presented information about services while students listened. A counselor then presented the attendance policy, specifying how many absences were permitted before students would be dropped, etc. Teachers were introduced and said hello. As one teacher said, students were 'talked at,' and the speeches amounted to 45 minutes of threats. The result was that students were made to feel like children whose situations, problems and concerns would not be taken into account. No one who went to one of these orientations ever returned for another.

Issue: ***How can orientation set the tone for instruction?*** In the new model at the same site, there is music and refreshments. After a brief welcome, each teacher has to present a piece of information about the program in Spanish even if this means struggling and making mistakes in front of the group. The message here is that it's OK to struggle in a second language and that everyone is both learning and teaching. Seeing teachers in this light puts students at ease and introduces the pedagogical approach. Further, even though the attendance policy is articulated, teachers also are able to acknowledge students' situations, difficulties in coming to class, etc. This is followed by a small group activity where students get to know each other (including people who may not be in their classes). The result has been that everyone comes back to orientation, even if they've been to one before. In fact, people who have not been admitted come as well: they've heard that the center is a good place and come to orientation as a way to check it out. In addition, retention has turned around - perhaps in part because their outside problems seen as valid, they come to class more often.

Implications: Orientation, like in-take, sets the tone for the whole educational endeavor. These initial encounters send students a message about what the center is like, how they will be treated, and what education is. If they are treated like children, and information is conveyed in a transmission model, students don't feel a sense of ownership and ease. They feel like they are on alien turf. Thus, the same principles which guide participatory classroom interaction, need to guide orientation and in-take; students need to be treated as equals and given the opportunity to begin building a learning community. This kind of participatory atmosphere has consequences for classroom dynamics, enrollment and retention.

Support Services: One of our sites had a full range of support services: childcare, counseling, legal assistance, job placement and housing assistance. Another developed a community support program in which students were hired and trained in different areas (housing, immigration law, etc.) so they could assist other students in these areas. These two models allowed us to see the benefits and pitfalls of different support structures. In the program with more services, the support component was structurally separate from the instructional component: there was little communication between counselors, day care workers, and teachers. The underlying assumption seemed to be that students were needy victims who had to be helped in solving problems; their problems were treated as external obstacles to be taken care of by experts. In the site with the community assistance program, students were trained as experts in particular areas so that they could become resources for their peers. In addition, class time was devoted to addressing support issues through curriculum content (see facing page).

Issue: ***How can programs balance the need for support services with the need to develop students' capacity to address their own problems?*** Although clearly students benefit from having as many support resources as possible to facilitate participation, we found that the way they are presented can foster either reliance on others for assistance (a welfare mentality) or reliance on their own resources. When problems are marginalized from the classroom, treated as individual issues and handed over to experts, the cycle of dependency is reinforced. When teachers become social-workers, trying to solve students' problems *for* them, they themselves become overwhelmed and undermine students' ability to address problems using their own resources. On the other hand, when problems are brought into the classroom and addressed collectively, curriculum content can become the basis for action, which is the essence of a problem-posing approach.

Implications: While support services are critical for effective adult education, the way they are integrated into programs is equally important. The guiding principle (that students must be involved in a participatory, problem-posing way) applies here as well as in curriculum development. This means that support and instructional components must be closely linked and problems dealt with through both. Structures for developing students' expertise and capacity to address their own problems must be set up wherever possible.

SUPPORT: DEPENDENCY OR SELF-RELIANCE?

The following examples from our minutes show the consequences of separating vs. integrating support services/issues and instruction.

"Charo has recently discovered a built-in connection for recruiting students who are not literate right at her site. There are many people who come to the center for social services (legal/housing assistance etc.) who don't read and write in Spanish - they sign their names with an X. These are people who don't sign up for ESL but are already part of the center's population and could easily be referred to classes by counselors. The fact that this connection is only now being discovered reflects the separation of the educational and the social service components at sites...

In a discussion about how the educational philosophy of programs affects classroom possibilities, teachers said problems are often 'treated' on an individual basis. Specifically, we talked about how attendance is often seen as a personal issue and dealt with through a 'counseling' mode, which has the effect of removing it from the context of class/group discussion. In this way, the problems may 'disappear' by being taken out of the teacher's hands but never really get addressed. We talked about how we can move from seeing things as personal to becoming part of the group responsibility." 10/88

Chapter 4 presents an example of making the issue of attendance into a literacy lesson. The following examples show how issues traditionally seen as support issues can become part of curriculum content and the basis for action.

"In Ann's center there was a tension between the school where the program is housed and the program itself because children aren't supposed to be in the classrooms (parents either bring them to class or can't come). The teachers brought this issue to their students in a variety of ways. Ann devoted a class to the problem and her students decided to take a collection to hire a babysitter who could watch the kids in the pre-school space during class time." 1/89

"Students in Charo's class have been talking about the problems of newcomers to Boston and all the things they have to deal with when they first arrive - finding a place to live, finding work, getting food, etc. They have decided to set up a bulletin board where students can post information about apartments which have space for someone to live, job openings and free food programs." 7/89

The Practioners' Bill of Rights

What practioners need from funders and program administrators to provide effective (and therefore cost-effective) adult literacy/ESL instruction:

1) **Full-time employment:** Teachers must be hired full-time so that they don't have to piece together several part-time jobs and can develop their work as professionals.

2) **Competetive salary and benefits:** Adult education teachers must be paid salaries comparable to other teachers and have benefits (including family benefits) so that qualified people stay in the field and develop it.

3) **Redefinition of qualifications:** Non-formal education, linguistic and cultural background factors, teaching experience and community ties should be given as much weight as formal education\advanced degrees in proposal evaluation and hiring.

4) **Staff development time:** Teachers must have paid time for training, teacher sharing, preparation and curriculum development. Job descriptions and course loads should reflect these responsiblities.

5) **Adequate instructional time for students:** Teachers must have the ability to determine duration of instructional cycles and student progress with no unrealistic expectations for how long it takes to learn ESL/literacy or limitations on length of instruction.

6) **Autonomy:** Teachers must be given autonomy in determining appropriate instructional content for their students rather than having curriculum and outcomes dictated by external needs.

7) **Alternative evaluation:** Programs should be evaluated through a variety of means (primarily qualitative) which reflect curriculum content, rather than solely on the basis of quantitative measures (test scores, grade levels, numbers of placements, etc.). Refunding should be contingent on program quality rather than numbers.

8) **Adequate support services:** Programming should include counseling, child care, and other support services so that teachers can concentrate primarily on instructional issues.

9) **Participation in program administration:** Teachers should be involved in program decision-making in all areas that effect their work (including in-take, hiring, placement and evaluation).

Chapter 4

INTO THE CLASSROOM: Overview of the Process

Before proceeding, discuss and list some of your own questions or concerns about the approach described so far in this Guide. Keep these questions for further reference.

In Chapter 2, we presented a theoretical framework for participatory curriculum development, outlining the process developed by Paulo Freire and how it has been adapted in a range of contexts; the chapter ended with some rather lofty guiding principles for a participatory approach to literacy. Chapter 3 began to address some of the hard realities of implementing this approach - how structural factors outside the classroom shape possibilities inside the classroom. In this chapter, we'll walk in the door of the classroom and at look at how a participatory cycle plays itself out with real students as we make the transition from theory to practice.

As soon as we started our own work with students, we began to confront questions like: How could we find student issues if their English was minimal? How could the classes be participatory if students expected a traditional, teacher-centered classroom? What should we do about students using their first language in class? This chapter will examine some of these recurring issues that arise in putting a participatory approach into practice, and, more importantly, suggest a process for addressing them as they come up.

YOUR PRACTICE...

Before reading about how our model played itself out in practice, take a few minutes to describe and discuss an example from your own practice. *Select a lesson or unit that you have recently completed or are in the middle of working on. If you're part of a group, talk about the lesson with your co-workers; if not, write up your account in a journal format. Use the following questions to guide your discussion/writing:*

Describe how you got into the unit/cycle:

What was the theme/content of the lesson?

Where did it come from? How did the theme come up?

What were your expectations/hopes for this lesson? What did you want to accomplish in the lesson?

Describe what happened as the lesson developed:

What activities did you do to develop this theme?

What was the discussion surrounding the theme? How did students react? What did they say?

What language skills were developed during this lesson?

What new student issues/concerns emerged?

Share some of your reflections on what happened:

How did the lesson differ from your expectations?

What were some issues/concerns that arose for you as a teacher while doing this lesson?

What issues of classroom dynamics emerged?

How might you follow up on this lesson?

...AND OURS: The teachers in our project both wrote and talked about their practice on a regular basis, using similar questions to describe and analyze what was happening in their classes. In the following excerpt from Talking Shop ("Traffic Tickets") Madeline Rhum describes how a unit unfolded in one of her classes.

An example of using a student's concern as the content for a literacy lesson occured when a student brought a traffic ticket to class which he did not understand... He brought the ticket to class because he wanted to pay it but did not know how to do so. I looked at the ticket and was not sure either. The reason for issuing the ticket was not at all clear. The extremely small print on the back of the ticket that is intended to explain the process for payment is written in legalese and was of no help. Other members of the class asked him about the circumstances when he got the ticket. As it turned out, he was not sure what he had done wrong and when he asked the police officer to explain the problem to him, he was ignored. As people asked more questions, he supplied more details about the incident as well as what he thought the reasons were for receiving the ticket. Other students talked about times they or their friends had gotten tickets. Several issues emerged from this discussion: 1. racism, 2. illliteracy, 3. the difficulties of being limited in speaking English, 4. quotas for ticketing.

For the following class, I wrote up the day's discussion as a reading. This generated further discussion about problems people had in dealing with the police. After some time, I suggested to the class that we could write a letter to the police commissioner or to the newspapers. Everyone thought this was a good idea. We talked about who to send it to and they decided that the newspaper would be better because many people would read it and gain some understanding about the problems facing immigrants. We spent part of the class writing a language experience story about why we wanted to write this letter and what we wanted it to say. The next day, two members of the class who had been absent earlier in the week returned and objected to the letter writing. They felt that the letter accused the police of discrimination and that such a thing didn't exist except within a few individuals. Some of the others felt strongly that there were problems of discrimination particularly in Boston. In the end everyone agreed to participate in the writing of the letter but that may have been to support their classmate rather than to acknowledge discrimination on a societal level. We continued the Language Experience Approach (LEA) with people's ideas...

Two days' worth of LEA's were not in any kind of logical order. For the next class I rewrote each sentence on a strip of newsprint. In class I introduced three categories in which to put the sentences: 1. This is the problem, 2. why we have this problem, 3. how to change/fix the problem. The students read each sentence and decided together whether it was a one, two or a three. After all the sentences were placed, we reread them and edited out the repetitions and added an introduction and a

closing. It was very exciting for me to see them collaborating on this critical thinking and editorial process. The better readers read the sentences but everyone could participate in making the decisions about where a sentence sounded good and made sense. After they finished the editing process, I numbered each strip so I could remember the order and typed up the letter. I brought the letter to class the next day. Everyone was proud of their work. However, some people were afraid to sign the letter. We talked about their fear and about the different ways police behave in different countries. In the end everyone signed the letter.

In Madeline's class, both the sequence of activities and outcome mirror the steps of Freire's critical thinking process in a general way (from describing a problem, to analyzing its causes to seeking solutions). She started by identifying a theme that came from of her students' lives. Because she was listening for issues, she realized that the parking ticket question was relevant for the whole group (rather than trying to answer the question on an individual basis as a teacher with a problem-solving outlook might have done). After finding the theme, she facilitated a discussion about the varying aspects of the problem, digging deeper into some of its root causes.

At this point, she introduced a literacy activity, writing up what the students had said in story form; this teacher-written text became the basis for a reading exercise and further discussion. Dialogue on the second day linked the particular problem to the range of experiences of participants, putting it into a broader context. Madeline then made some suggestions for acting on the problem. This in turn led to another literacy activity, this time a collaborative writing effort in which Madeline wrote the students' words (using the language experience method). The following day, new participants brought the discussion to a deeper level - the question of societal discrimination. While no unanimous conclusion was reached, there was vigorous debate and critical thinking about an issue that touches students deeply. The process of group or collective action continued with the letter writing.

At this point, Madeline introduced another literacy activity, taking the ideas generated through dialogue to the level of composing: she provided a means for students to organize ideas even though their lower order decoding, letter formation, spelling and grammar skills were minimal. By providing the mechanical support of writing the students' sentences on strips and cutting up the strips, she facilitated the process of moving to a higher conceptual level: in a sense, they were able to do a kind of manual word-processing using these strips. This method allowed these so-called 'low-level' students to proceed with the higher level skills of developing their ideas, organizing them, revising them and editing them. The final outcome was an action that took the form of a letter.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PARTICIPATORY CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

PLEASE NOTE: THIS PROCESS IS NOT LINEAR - IT'S CYCLICAL.

LISTENING to find student themes

During this phase, student and teachers work together to identify key/loaded issues, themes and concerns from the students' lives through:

-conscious listening before, during and after class
-structured activities to elicit student themes (readings, grammar work, journals, responding to and producing drawings or photos, student research activities, interviews, language experience stories)

EXPLORING student themes through participatory literacy activities

During this phase, a variety of participatory tools and techniques are used to develop students' language and literacy in the process of exploring student themes. These include:

-published reading selections (excerpts from texts, newspapers, literature)
-teacher-written selections (short passages, 'codes,' organic primers)
-collaborative student-teacher texts (language experience stories, collaborative stories, dialogue journals)
-group and individual student writing (journals, letters, testimonials)
-oral histories
-photo-stories

EXTENDING literacy to action inside and outside the classroom

-Inside the classroom, students make changes in classroom dynamics, produce materials for use by others, participate in curriculum choices, support each other in addressing problems in the process of doing literacy work.

-Outside the classroom, students participate in actions at the literacy center, in their families, workplaces and communities

EVALUATING learning and actions

Students participate in evaluating their own progress, the teaching and the program as a whole; they reflect on outcomes and new issues which emerge from the process.

The chart on page 92 generalizes this process, presenting a schematic overview of its components. Although this movement from finding a theme, to exploring it through participatory literacy activities and taking action represents both the process outlined by Freire and the overall direction we followed in our practice, what's interesting about Madeline's class is that it differs from the the idealized model in a number of ways. First, the issue didn't come as the result of an extended research phase; second, literacy activities were interspersed throughout, with a constant going back and forth between analysis and reading/writing work, rather than a linear movement from dialogue to decoding to action; third, the idea for action was introduced by the teacher rather than by the group; fourth, the action didn't have any direct, overt impact on the outside world or changing the conditions in students' lives. Finally, evaluation is not a separate, explicit stage.

Our experience has been that Madeline's class was typical in that it didn't follow the model exactly. In fact, what we found is that there is no single pattern to how themes will develop. The essence of an emergent curriculum is that not only the content (themes and issues), but also the sequence and choice of activities vary from situation to situation. Thus, while the chart on the facing page represents in schematic form the various components of a participatory process, and it is important to have this kind of conceptual overview to guide practice, it is also important to remember that the way it plays itself out in practice changes every time around. As such, the overview should be seen more as a hypothesis than a lock-step guide. There is a dialectical relationship between having a conceptual framework and not rigidly adhering to it. Chapters 5 - 8 look at each of the components on the chart separately (ways to find themes, explore them using participatory tools, take action and evaluate the process). Taking things apart in this way serves a pedagogical function, but at the same time it doesn't capture the dynamic nature of how the process plays itself out in the classroom. Talking Shop presents accounts of what actually happens when these components are synthesized into classroom cycles, following the development of themes from beginning to end.

Although each cycle and experience implementing the process is different, certain issues and themes have recurred throughout our project and will, no doubt confront anyone involved in participatory curriculum development. The next section of this chapter will focus on some of the general classroom issues which cut across different phases of curriculum development.

ISSUES FROM PRACTICE

Participatory cycles: Does it still count if we don't follow the steps of the proceess? An early misconception we had was that the components of the participatory process occur in a linear, sequential order, starting with an extended period of identifying issues, developing a core set of units around these issues, moving sequentially through the units with each unit including particular phases of structured dialogue, participatory classroom activities, actions outside the classroom and group evaluation. This view came in part from the Freirean model in which the teacher immerses him/herself in the learners' community for several months in order to know that community, isolate specific themes and transform them into 'codes' before beginning teaching.

However, the reality of adult ESL doesn't usually allow for a preliminary investigation stage in students' community before classes begin because students come from different backgrounds, language groups, parts of the city, occupations, etc. The classroom itself may be the only community that students have in common. Further, because teachers are often part-time and underpaid, they don't have time for outside investigation. In addition, we have found that issues never exist in a vacuum - they are situated in time and have power to the extent that they emerge from a particular situation. Madeline, for example, could not have decided before classes began that she wanted to work on police discrimination: the unit 'worked' because it was came from a concrete situation. Hence, the identification of themes often emerges as a result of classroom interaction rather than as a pre-condition to it. Investigating student issues is a constant, ongoing, cyclical process, integrated into instruction.

Second, in practice, we often skip stages in the process or jump back and forth between them. Many issues which teachers think are rich in potential end up wilting on the vine and never making beyond the dialogue phase. Perhaps only 50% of the themes which we work on move to some form of action. Nevertheless, as Charo said, it's wrong to evaluate individual lessons in isolation:

> Charo said that very often individual lessons appear quite traditional - it's the process which builds through a cycle, or through the life of a class that becomes participatory. In fact, looking at lessons in isolation, out of context may be misleading. It is the progression of lessons in which students are increasingly involved that builds a participatory atmosphere.

Thus, we moved toward an understanding that themes and units didn't come in neat packages with beginnings, middles and ends. More realistic than a sequence of extended phases (proceeding from investigation to dialogue, literacy and action), is the notion of a series of short-term cycles, each of which starts with the emergence of a theme that is immediately explored through dialogue and sometimes followed by action and evaluation. Like in Madeline's example, the literacy activities are woven throughout each cycle, coming at various points along the way. **The participatory nature of the class emerges through a cumulative process, rather than by following a sequential or linear procedure.**

Conflicting Agendas: What if students want a traditional, teacher-centered class? Very often the only model of education that adult literacy students are familiar with is the very model which has excluded them in the past: the teacher-fronted transmission-of-knowledge-and-skills model. They think that learning is only legitimate when it involves worksheets, grammar exercises, linear progression through a textbook, drills and tests. Teachers are supposed to talk and students are supposed to listen or respond. They may see discussions as diversions from 'real' language work and attempts to involve them in decision-making about the curriculum as a sign of the teacher's incompetence; if we ask for student input about activities or directions, the response is "You're the teacher; you should know - whatever you think is best."

This poses a dilemma: if we claim to follow a model centered around student concerns, what do we do if their initial concern is to have a teacher-centered model? If we're genuinely participatory, shouldn't we do what *they* want? Aren't we imposing our own view if we don't follow their wishes? In responding to this dilemma, we have to remember that students make this choice often because it's the only model they've been exposed to - they don't know there are alternatives; secondly, we have to keep in mind that the model they know is also very often one that they have had little success with - it's often the very reason that they have literacy problems at this point in their lives. In order to address this dilemma we need to both respect student wishes (so as not to impose a model they're uncomfortable with which would reinforce a "teacher-knows-best" dynamic) and give students some real alternatives; they need a basis for making informed choices. We've done this by: 1) mixing the old with the new; 2) explicitly focusing on conceptions of education as curriculum content; 3) including classroom dynamics as content; 4) including students in ongoing evaluation (described in Chapter 8).

1) Mixing the old with the new: Students and teachers both need to feel safe in the classroom and often traditional roles are the most comfortable for everyone. It is important to acknowledge this need and not feel that we constantly have to be innovative, breaking the rules in every lesson. The key is not scrapping all the tried and true ways, while at the same time pushing ourselves to take risks, asking "How is what I'm doing different from what I've done before?" For us, this has meant mixing traditional forms (grammar exercises, fill-in-the-blanks, etc.) with less familiar forms. *Very often it's not so much the materials being used, but how they're used that differentiates a participatory curriculum from a more traditional one.* Lessons can be set up so that the teacher provides a structure, but content comes from the students. Madeline adapted lessons from Molinsky and Bliss' Side by Side and Line by Line by simplifying the grammar, enlarging the print and asking students to relate content to their own experiences. Ann Cason, for example, did the following lesson combining work on used to with drawing out (literally) information on holidays:

1. Ann started by talking about Thanksgiving, what the holiday is and what she used to do with her family.
2. Students corrected a story about Thanksgiving using used to.
3. Ann asked students to tell about holidays in their countries.
4. Students talked about what they used to do for those holidays.
5. They drew pictures about the holidays, writing used to sentences with them.

Ironically, sometimes students' refusal to do something which the teacher sees as student-centered may be an indication that the class is becoming genuinely participatory and student-centered - it shows that students feel real ownership of the curriculum process.

In one of Madeline's classes, students resisted the idea of writing personal stories about education in their homelands because they said they wanted to work on grammar: they were able to do this precisely because they knew that they could determine the direction of the class. In fact, when Madeline began a lesson similar to Ann's with a story about her Thanksgiving vacation as a way to work on the past tense, they spent the entire two hours talking about holidays in different countries. She wrote up this discussion which became the basis for more grammar work. *What struck her was that although students said they didn't want to focus on their own stories, they couldn't stop telling them and, in fact, saw them as perfectly legitimate when they were framed as grammar work.*

2) Reading, writing and talking about different approaches to education as an explicit part of curriculum content: An important aspect of moving from one model to another is sharing educational experiences and expectations. As students reflect on their past education, both formal and informal, they develop an awareness of what worked and didn't work for them. Three ways to do this are through learning pictures, school stories and making classroom dynamics into content.

***Learning Pictures**: One way we've done this is by presenting photos of different learning situations - traditional teacher-fronted classes, people learning in groups where there is no obvious leader, parents teaching children to ride bikes, children learning from each other, etc. These pictures then become the basis for discussion and writing about how people feel in different settings for learning, how students themselves are teachers, how people learn from each other, etc. Loren has written an account of using these learning pictures in Talking Shop ("Learning Pictures"). Talking about education is important not only for the adults' learning, but also for understanding their children's learning.

***School stories**: Students also write about their own experiences after reading other people's published stories about schooling. The following story was written by one of Ann's students:

My first school experience

When I was 5 years old, I like to watch the children going to school. I remember one day I asked my mother, "Why don't I go to school?" and she answered me that I was still a child.

My house was near the school. So one day, I went to school by myself. When I met a teacher, I asked her the same question, "Why can't I come to school." and she answered, "Because we don't have enough desks." "After that, I went back to my house, and the following day, I took a small, old chair from my house, and I went to school. When I entered the classroom (it was the fourth grade) all the children watched me and started to laugh at me. I started to cry and cry immediately...

The teacher asked me, "What are you doing here?" But I couldn't say anything because I was crying so much and I decided to go back home and forget about school.

***Making classroom dynamics into instructional content:** Another way to bridge the gap between a traditional and a participatory approach is to develop lessons around issues of classroom dynamics. In this way, students can express their ideas about how classes should be run (and even disagree with a teacher's "participatory" mode if they choose) and make changes in this community. In the following journal excerpt, Andy talks about an instance where she brought an educational issue back to students for discussion. Here, making the issue of use of personal information into a topic for classwork enabled students to reflect on what they had been doing, give some feedback, and take some action while reinforcing their sense of control. In this case, the decision not to do something is a form of action.

Last month, a student suggested that we start a suggestion box, where students could present their ideas anonymously. For awhile, no one made use of it. Then, one day, we found the following message, written in Spanish except for the parenthesized phrase:

Certain teachers ask about our lives in class (I don't like it). There are ways of teaching English that don't require finding out about someone's life.

I brought the issue into the classrooms for group discussion, where most people assured me that personal discussions were interesting for them and that they felt that the assignments left room for them to be personal or impersonal as they liked. They told me that the degree to which they reveal personal information was their choice. "Nobody have to say what they don't want."

However, there were a couple of assignments that made them uncomfortable - specifically, those that involved recounting the history of how and why they came to the United States. They were particularly disturbed by an assignment that a non-teaching staff member gave them. In an attempt to promote our center and the cause of Hispanics in Boston, he pushed them to write their personal stories for a public newsletter.

Their anger and confusion over this request did not surface until the personal information suggestion was under discussion. Their grievance was brought to the staffperson's attention. He came to the class and rephrased his request so that the students better understood his motivation and their option to participate or not. To date, none have written anything for the newsletter.

Example: In another instance, Andy presented the following code after she noticed a tension between students who attended regularly and those who missed classes and then required review.

Nidia: This class is boring. I wish the teacher would do something new.

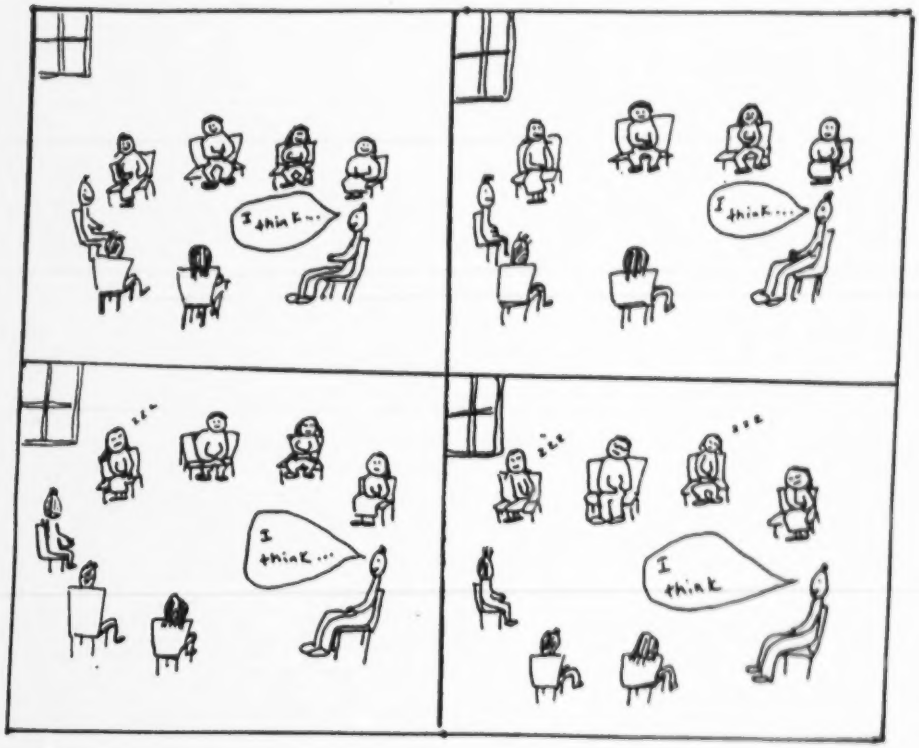
Juan: I like it. I wasn't here last time so this is new for me.

Nidia: Well, why don't you come to class regularly so that we don't have to review all the time?

Juan: Sometimes I miss the bus from work and the next one doesn't come for an hour.

She reported that the result was better communication between the two groups, increased empathy and no more tension; in addition, there was more peer tutoring and less class time spent on review.

Example: Ann Cason used the following graphic to frame a discussion about uneven class participation after some students had written "The teacher should make some people be quiet and others talk" in a class evaluation (see the Talking Shop, "Group Dynamics" for a full account of this lesson).



Working with low-level students: How can we find and explore student issues if students can't express themselves in English? One of our big concerns early on was that that there wouldn't be much we could do in a participatory way with low level students because of their language limitations. Madeline, in particular, had students from different language backgrounds with minimal English and first language literacy skills. While she constantly reminded us about the reality of these constraints when we talked about finding and exploring themes, she also constantly pushed herself to develop ways of adapting the model with these students. The following principles guided most of our work with low level students:

1) Break things down or simplify them in terms of *form* but not in terms of *content*. The point here is to make print accessible without diluting its meaning or making content child-like. In the parking ticket example, Madeline simplified the mechanical aspects of the composing process while pushing conceptual development to a higher level. Other ways teachers in our project did this include:

-starting with non-language-based materials: using open-ended pictures to which students can bring their own words and interpretations; having students draw and label their own pictures.

-on the graphic level, using the xerox machine to enlarge text excerpts; rewriting passages by hand; leaving a great deal of blank space on the page; providing a format for exercises.

-on the linguistic level, rewriting highly meaningful, loaded passages in simplified language (for example, a newspaper headline).

-on a decoding level, using content that's relevant, meaningful and drawn from student experience like key words related to the home land.

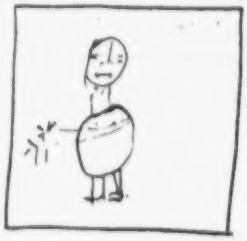
-on a textual level, do pre-reading and pre-writing activities through which students develop a conceptual/schematic framework for building meaning; break longer texts into sections and assign each section to different students.

Here teachers provide a graphic layout to guide students' writing:

Write a letter to a teacher
Write about what you think
children should learn in
school. Use the expression
to tell the truth."

Dear Teacher.

When my children come home
They only have drawing stuff with
Them. I ~~don't~~ for telling you the truth that
it not But I want you to change
the lesson. "Don't get me wrong"
That I said, because I ~~want~~
my children to have a
good future.



1. Hi
2. I am
3. I am
4. I am
5. I am from

write your story again.

1. Hi
2. I am
3. I am
4. I am
5. I am from Haiti

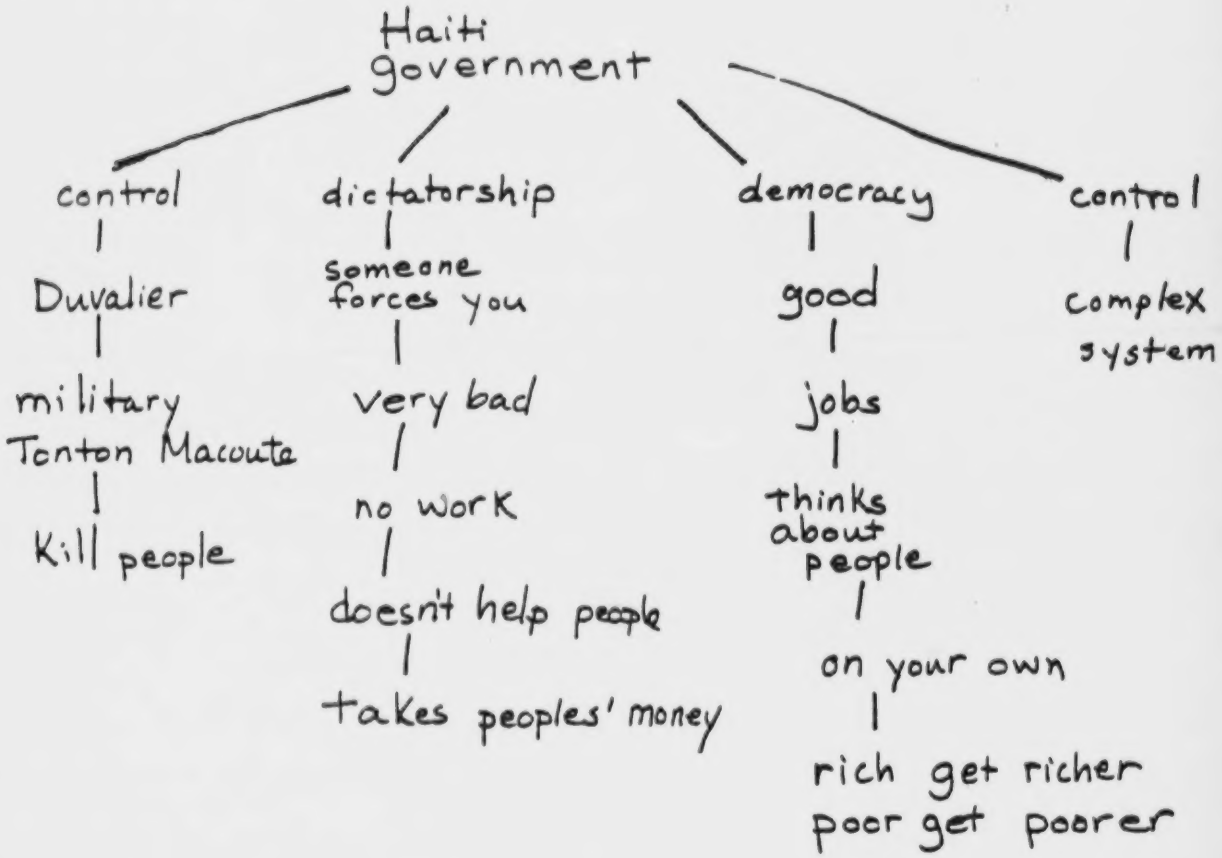
2) Never underestimate your students. Our experience has been that when students are interested in the content of a lesson, they are capable of doing much more than we may expect. Time and again, when we were worried about material being too hard, we found that students responded well if they were interested in it. Levels are neither inherent in materials or in students: students' ability to handle material depends as much on their interest in it and how it's presented as on language factors.

Ann reported that she tried using the "Family Story" - a cartoon version of a student story about the division of work inside the home. She was apprehensive about using this material because the langauge level was more advanced than her students' level and because the format is quite complicated. The students responded enthusiastically, taking on the roles of different people in the story, acting out and discussing a variety of endings for the story. Ann's feeling was that it turned out to be positive that the material wasn't easy: it gave the students something to struggle with and because the content was meaningful, they were able to overcome the format and language difficulties. *When the meaning is directly related to students' experience, the problems of form become secondary.*

The exercise on the next page was done around the time of the Haitian elections. Madeline asked students to think of any word that came to mind when they heard the word election. She wrote the words on the board (many of which were cognates in French/Creole and English); from these, students identified four key words. She used these as the basis for another clustering exercise from which the class generated the following chart. In this exericse, students generated a sophisticated political analysis at a highly developed conceptual level despite a relatively low level of language proficiency.

An Election in Haiti

Your Words



Using the first language: What should the teacher do if students use the first language (L1) in the classroom? The traditional assumption is that the first language should be used as little as possible in an ESL class. This assumption rests on the notion that students will learn the second language better if they are forced to express themselves in it at all times (although research evidence on this issue is not conclusive). Very often teachers feel it is their responsibility to make students stick to English; they become the enforcers of an English-only rule in class. This, however, creates two problems in a participatory approach: first, it reinforces the role of the teacher as authority figure; second, it makes it more difficult to find themes and promote conceptual development with low-level students. This issue can also become a source of tension between students: some may feel more comfortable learning English through the first language and use it frequently in class while others may feel that it's being used too much - they're here to learn English.

Our experience is that letting go of the notion that using the L1 is always bad relieves much of the tension around this issue for both teachers and students. More importantly, the L1 can act as a powerful bridge to the second language as well as promoting literacy and conceptual development. The following excerpt from our minutes summarizes some of our discussion around this topic:

Usually people ask a yes-or-no question about this issue: *Should the first language be used in an ESL class?* Instead we should ask: *What are the functions of using the L1? How and when should the L1 be used?* Some of the functions of L1 use we have identified in our classes include:

*finding themes
*explaining learning strategies or grammar points: using L1 to talk about language/literacy (developing metalinguistic awareness)
*giving directions, getting clarification
*developing meaning: for conceptual development/critical thinking about an issue (this promotes the notion that it matters that what you say in English is meaningful and you can develop your ideas in L1 before expressing them in L2).
*to talk about very loaded emotional topics
*to promote the bonding of the group
*translating

Whether or not these functions contribute to language and cognitive development depends on the circumstances and must be discussed with students.

However, it is not enough for us to determine when it is and isn't helpful to use the first language - if we come up with a new set of 'rules' for language choice, we are continuing in our roles of problem-solvers or enforcers. Rather, the key is figuring out *with* students in what ways the L1 helps or hinders class goals, when they want to use it and when they don't. Since language choice is a problem of classroom dynamics, it makes sense to deal with it in a problem-posing way. Exploring this issue with students enables them to develop conceptually, and set their own guidelines, taking the teacher out of the role of being the authority. When the decision is in their hands, they become monitors for each other. The following excerpt from our minutes illustrates the importance of giving students a choice:

> Loren used pictures from a UNICEF calendar of different families as a catalyst for writing. When she asked students to write about the pictures, many of them sat at their seat doing nothing. She then told them that it was OK to write in Spanish if they wanted to or to write in English until they got stuck and then use Spanish words to get unstuck. When she said this, students began writing: one student chose to write in Spanish only; others wrote in English with some Spanish mixed in; one wrote in English only. Loren said she felt that these directions gave her students the liberty to say a lot more in English.

This example shows that the issue of language choice is profoundly linked to self-expression. If our goal in family literacy is truly to make literacy a vehicle for making meaning and making change, we may need to let go of the notion that expressing oneself in English is the only thing that counts. What's interesting is that by letting go of the need to stress English, we may in fact be providing the most powerful basis for developing literacy in both languages. Our experience has been that once students are able to elaborate their ideas in the first language, their ability to express themselves in the second language is enhanced. The following excerpt from <u>On Focus</u> (a documentation of a participatory photography project done with one family literacy class) illustrates the powerful relationship between giving students choice/control and language/literacy development.

Here Loren McGrail writes about a lesson in which she had planned to invite students to take pictures and write about their neighborhoods. Originally she intended to model the process by taking pictures of her own neighborhood, talking about the process and inviting students to do the same. Here she explains what happened when she brought them to class.

Instead of showing and telling the students about the pictures I had taken, as planned, I asked them what they saw when looking at them as a group. This open approach allowed each student to see and express what she saw in the picture. One student said in looking at my picture of the victory garden that this reminded her of her father, that they used to have a garden like this and that her father had died in a garden like this on her birthday. We were all quite taken aback by this sudden and serious comment, but while I was searching around for something comforting and appropriate to say, it seemed as if others had picked up on the idea that these pictures reminded them of gardens back in their countries. They all agreed that my picture of the fountain and detailed iron work (originally representing my view of the wealthy) looked like parts of old San Juan and that this made them feel homesick. They became quite animated and I could tell they wanted to continue talking about this in Spanish. I gave them "permission" to continue to speak in Spanish and only interrupted a few times to get clarification since my Spanish was still very rudimentary. This was the first time they had spoken at length in front of me...

I was thrilled, nervous and unsure of what to do next since my original lesson plan had evolved into something else. All I knew was this was where the energy was, and that the writing could come from this. So I asked them if they wanted to write some of their ideas down and that we would all write for about 10 minutes. I told them to write in whichever language they felt like...

At the end of 10 minutes, I asked if people needed more time. Everyone said yes, so we all wrote for another 10 minutes. I wrote also since I was dying to tell them my interpretation of my pictures. When everyone stopped writing, I suggested that we read our writings aloud. Everyone agreed but looked a little bashful and uncomfortable. They all had written in Spanish except for Angel, who wrote in English about me, the photographer... I told them this was not problem and that I would ask for clarification when I needed it.

There is no adequate way for me to explain or express what happened next. We all read our pieces, laughed and made comments to each other. This was a very empowering and vulnerable experience for me - to be

listening to my students reading to me in Spanish. I felt vulnerable because I could not be their teacher in the old sense and offer corrections in either Spanish or English. I also felt vulnerable because my Spanish was not great so I really had to listen and ask a lot of questions. Yet, I felt empowered because I felt they were now treating me like an equal by not trying to please me by writing in English. The class had reached that level of intimacy one always hopes for; so much so that they were able to discuss with both interest and understanding Maria's struggle to write in Spanish and why she would rather make many mistakes in English than lose face in Spanish.

After we had all read our pieces aloud, I admitted to them the surprising turn my lesson had taken and how surprised I was at first that my pictures of my neighborhood looked like places in their home countries. I also felt it was important for me to tell them about how I felt listening to them talk and read in Spanish. We all agreed that my Spanish improved over the course of the class, but also that this had been a very special class.

And the end of the story is that they did want to go out and take pictures of their neighborhoods and to write about those pictures. And as could now be expected, people took very different pictures ranging from inner city parks to trees.

"THE PARK"

This picture reminds me when I was 11 years old. This is the park where I played with my sister and niece all day and night.

In this building on the 3rd floor: I lived in these area when I was young. I remember when I wrote some words like the ones that you see in that wall. When I pass through there, I get tears in my eyes, and sometimes when I played there my father always looked at me and called me.

"Mary it is late "and I felt mad and in my mind I wanted to live alone and to do what I wanted.

And now he is dead and I miss him a lot because he took care of me more than my mother. And now I feel sad because my father died on the same day of my birthday.

These two pictures make me think more than you can believe.

MARIA RIVERA

Teacher-Sharing: A Framework for Addressing Issues

These issues from practice are only the beginning of the story. There are others at every stage of the curriculum development process: How do we handle issues that are very hot or very personal? How can we bridge the gap between discussions and literacy work? How can we link personal concerns to the social context? What does action mean?[1] While these questions are common for anyone involved in participatory ESL, there are bound to be others: just as the issues that emerge for students are unpredictable so too are the issues that emerge for teachers involved in curriculum development. For this reason, what is most important is not so much the particular issues discussed in this guide, but rather the process for dealing with new ones as they arise. **The key to participatory curriculum development is having a structure or framework for addressing issues of practice as they arise.**

In our project, the way we dealt with curriculum issues paralleled the process we used with students: we relied on each others' resources, sharing problems, strategies, and materials as equal participants in a common endeavor. We called this process **teacher-sharing** and attempted to schedule it into each weekly meeting. This sharing was an integral part of curriculum development for us. It was a time when teachers talked about what was happening in their classes, describing how a theme emerged, what activities were used to develop it, how it was followed up and most importantly, concerns that arose out of it (very much following the pattern of questions we asked about your practice on page 89). Instead of describing or reporting on everything everyone was doing, teachers often selected one lesson or issue they were immersed in, sharing why it developed the way it did, possible ideas for what to do next, problems or questions they were thinking about and unexpected outcomes. If a teacher didn't feel like anything particularly interesting was happening, she might choose not to share anything or talk about why her class was in the doldrums. If there wasn't time for everyone to talk, teachers took turns. If someone felt that an outside resource would be helpful in addressing an issue, we scheduled a workshop or training session on that topic. The best way to get a flavor of how this worked is by reading the minutes of one of our a teacher-sharing sessions. As you read these minutes, try to identify some of the issues described in this chapter and think about other curriculum issues which are raised.

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[1] These (and others) will be addressed in later chapters.

TEACHER-SHARING (Minutes from a Family Literacy meeting)

Madeline's class: M. presented a picture of an Ethiopian woman with her child, a moving picture reflecting sorrow, intimacy. In response to this picture, one of her students got up and acted out the story of her own flight to the U.S.; she told the whole story in English, with dramatic explanations of escaping from the detention center, having no shoes and having to steal them. The whole class was riveted on the story of this woman. This episode raised a number of questions for Madeline: How could she get beyond the individual experience level without detracting from the power of the woman's story? How was this a language/literacy activity? Does this kind of recounting of personal history promote critical thinking? If so, how? If not, how do we get to that level? Others in the group proposed a variety of ways to move beyond this woman's story:

1. Break the dialgoue process into a number of days.
2. Invite students on the next day to do a follow-up language activity (a language experience story, or comprehension, re-telling task centered on wh-questions, or small group writing activities about the story).
3. Move from a language activity to generalizing questions:
   Why did you leave your country? How did you leave?
   Why do so many people from your country come to the U.S.?
4. If the students pursue the issue of being separated from children, as questions like, "How can you continue to support your children from far away?

Loren's class: In response to the question about whether the dialogue process itself is too invasive, and what to do if students balk at discussing issues, Loren suggested making the language focus of the lesson more explicit. She described how she uses codes for grammar work to addresss the students' and teachers' desire for structured language exercises.

1. Scramble lines of the dialogue on the board. Ask students context questions: How many people are talking? What nationality are they? Where is this taking place? Someone suggested also asking: How do you know?
2. Ask students to reconstruct the dialogue so that it makes sense.
3. Discuss the reconstructed dialogue in terms of vocabulary, and structures, asking: Is there anything new here?
4. Write the questions for discussion on cards and divide them into piles with one question from each of the five levels in each pile. In groups of three, students discuss their pile: one person asks questions, one responds and one takes notes.
5. Report back: students read and discuss each others' responses.

At first students continued to give answers that they thought Loren wanted - the answers still felt canned. As Loren proceeded through the steps with a language focus and breaking the lesson down into parts (using larger print) students began for the first time to respond in terms of the content of the issue: paradoxically, because the content is loaded, the language focus allows students the security to begin to get at the content.

Charo's class: In the middle of the unit dealing with negative stereotypes about homelands, a woman came into class and said she couldn't continue class because one of her kids had been stabbed. This prompted an outpouring of stories about violence in the schools: knives in the bathroom, 12 year-olds bringing knives to school for self-defense, etc. This outburst raised many questions for Charo: How should she handle this in terms of teaching? Should she try to get back on target with the homelands project or pursue the concerns about violence? Is this too big a subject to take on? Is this an interruption? If the class does pursue the violence theme, what can they do about it?

The first question seemed to be whether to do anything at all about the theme or get back to the homelands project. Andy suggested that Charo bring this question back to the students themselves to see what they wanted to do. We discussed what the class might do in terms of literacy work and action if they decided to pursue the violence issue.

1. Start by extending the discussion to reasons for the violence (the social context) and alternative approaches to dealing with violence (eg. discussing things like the proposed body searches); talk about what parents can do (possible actions and their consequences)
2. Document in testimonial form the experiences of immigrant parents with violence in the schools (eg. language experience stories/oral histories/student writing)
3. Use this documentation as a possible basis for action, eg. going to the media (letters to the editor, news releases, pamphlets/interview with local columnist)
4. Write photo-stories to support the documentation
5. Participate in parent-teacher meetings and other collaborations.

Ann's class: Ann presented a story about loneliness that one of her students had written. She did this as a result of another discussion about whether or not to talk about students' own lives in class: some had felt that it was a waste of time, but the conclusion they came to was that student stories should be mixed with other activities, written up and presented as language activities with the student's permission. The loneliness story was one such activity. It prompted discussion about how students can deal with loneliness in a new country, as well as an interesting side discussion about whether going to English class is the same as learning English!

Chapter 5

WAYS IN: Finding Student Themes

The essence of a participatory approach is centering instruction around content that is engaging to students. Where a more traditional approach determines topics through a priori needs assessments and curriculum outlines, a participatory approach involves students in the process of uncovering themes and issues *as an integral part of classroom interaction.* This is what we call finding '**ways in**' to what's important to students (the listening component of the process). This co-investigation is critical because:

1) It assures relevance of content: if the issues come from students' lives, the interest level is higher than if they are imposed. We found over and over again that even issues that we as teachers thought would be interesting often fell flat if they hadn't concretely emerged from the classroom interaction.

2) It shifts the balance of power in the classroom: when issues are identified **with** students rather than **for** students, they gain a measure of control over their own learning. They become the researchers of their own lives instead of the objects of someone else's research.

3) The very process of identifying issues develops "literate" skills: as students research their own literacy uses and needs, they develop a range of skills from observing, to recording, to reporting and analyzing, all of which contribute to language and literacy development.

Your experience...

If you are a teacher or working in a teachers' group, think about or discuss some of the following:

Describe a lesson or class from your experience in which students were particularly open and engaged with the topic. Briefly describe where the theme came from: was it your idea? If so, why did you choose it? Did it arise from something that had happened in class? What led up to it - a structured activity? a casual conversation? something you overheard before class?

List a few concerns or issues that you think are important for your students. How do you know they are important? What happened to make you think they are important?

Describe a critical incident from your class: a critical incident is something unexpected and loaded with emotion that happened with your students - a time someone came to class with a problem, a story, a preoccupation, etc., a time that everyone suddenly burst into their first language and couldn't stop talking, a time when someone missed class because of something important in their life, a time when there was an argument or tears or laughter... After you describe the critical incident, try to identify the underlying issue embedded in it particularly as it relates to others in the class.

Describe something unexpected that happened in one of your classes: Did you ever plan a lesson expecting a certain kind of response from students, but something quite different happened? Or did something come up in class that made you throw out your lesson plans completely and 'go with the flow?' Describe what happened and what you learned about your students from this experience.

List some **Ways In**: After you've described a number of experiences using the above questions to assist you, try to make some generalizations about finding student issues. What kinds of activities, situations, conditions, are most helpful for discovering student concerns? What are some ways that you can find out about what's important to them?

Our experience...

How do we go about finding students concerns? To begin with, it's important to mention some things that we don't do and that probably won't work.

Ideally, the kind of participant-observation in the community of the learners described by Freire is a powerful way to get to know the conditions and issues most critical for a particular group. However, as we said in Chapter 2, this approach may be neither practical nor effective for adult ESL in a North American context: students often don't come from a single community, teachers don't have time to do this kind of intense participant observation, and most importantly, issues identified in this way lose some of their timeliness because they don't emerge from the actual, concrete concerns of participants. While the teachers in our project had close ties to the communities of the learners and a general familiarity with issues of concern to them, the most powerful issues were often the ones that students themselves brought in or identified during the course of classroom interaction. Thus, classes went back and forth between themes identified by teachers based on their knowledge of the communities and issues which arose from the particular group.

A second misconception is that themes can be identified just by asking students what they want to study or what their concerns are. Again, since students have often internalized the very model of 'good' education which has excluded them in the past - the teacher-fronted-transmission-of-knowlege-and skills model, these questions may seem odd to them: teachers are supposed to know what to do. Or, while they may appreciate being asked, their answers may not be very productive. They may come up with vague goals (speaking better, improving English to get a better job, learning grammar, reading, etc.) and the kinds of activities they are most familiar with (dictation, tests, workbook exercises, etc.). Finally, students may be suspicious of any questions which seem intrusive or personal: they are used to dealing with bureaucracies where information can be used against them. Without a basis of trust, they may be reluctant to share anything specific about their lives.

This means that the teacher's job at the beginning of each cycle is to **set the tone**, creating contexts for issues to emerge in an organic way. The starting point has to be building of trust through non-threatening activities which allow students to share something of their lives in a format that is familiar and comfortable. The first lesson for students has to be that their experiences are valued in the classroom and that it's safe to share parts of their lives with others.

Even when trust is built, however, it is important not to assume that issues will fall from the sky - that they will emerge automatically without any guidance by the teacher. Again, there must be a delicate balance between spontanaiety and planning. While it is clearly true that the most powerful issues emerge when we least expect them and have done nothing to find them, it is also true that we can't just sit around and wait for them to appear. We have to both create the conditions for issues to emerge spontaneously and at the same time make a conscious effort to elicit them through structured, teacher-initiated activities. This means combining what we call **conscious listening** (an openness to going with the flow, hearing what's hidden between the lines, following up on 'diversions,' etc.) with **catalyst activities** (guided language activities that encourage student input).

Catalysts may be relatively structured activities like class **rituals**, **grammar exercises** and **student research**. Alternatively, they can be presented in an open-ended way, with minimal teacher-directed guidance for responses. One of the things we've found is that the more instructions, format and modeling we provide, the more we shape the ways that students respond. While this kind of guidance is sometimes necessary and helpful, it is also important at times for student responses to be completely open and uninfluenced by teachers' input. NOT to give too much guidance is a way of letting go of control; often it results in the most surprising and interesting responses which lead in directions we never would have predicted.

The list on the facing page outlines the **Ways In** which we have explored in our project. It is by no means meant to be exhaustive - you probably already have ideas to add from the exercise you did at the beginning of this chapter. The pages following the outline include descriptions of particular **Ways In** we have used with examples from our classes.

WAYS IN

Finding Student Themes

SETTING THE TONE: Start-up Activities

Our History Book
Family photos/albums
Family trees
Life journeys

CONSCIOUS LISTENING

Conversations before, during and after class
Reading between the lines

CATALYST ACTIVITIES

Grammar Exercises

In my country, in the U.S....
Substitution drills
I need/I want/I like charts
Feelings: I feel angry when_____.
Charts

Class Rituals

Good News/Bad News; Weekend stories
Class Accomplishments
Posted Journals

Student Research

Home research (a range of topics)
Investigating language and literacy use (in class/in the family/ in the community)

Responding to Photographs

Responding to Readings

Writing Exercises

SETTING THE TONE: Start-up Activities

The key task at the beginning of a cycle is to create an atmosphere of trust in which students feel they can share what's important to them and make the class their own. Activities listed in this section are designed to make students feel that their ideas, experiences and knowledge are valued. While specific themes or concerns may not emerge from these activities, they are important in terms of establishing a student-centered climate and sending the message that participants' realities provide legitimate content for language/literacy development. Of course, a delicate balance must be struck between inviting students to be open and respecting their privacy: it is important not to put them on the spot with direct personal questions. Drawing students out without being invasive requires sensitivity on the part of the teacher. Some of the ways we've approached this task are:

1) Starting with the impersonal: Madeline began a new class by showing students pictures of newcomers and for each, asking, "Why does he want to study English?" Students generated a list of reasons people might want to study; after this modeling with fictional people, she turned the question back to the students themselves, asking "Why do *you* want to study English?" getting an outpouring of responses.

2) Immediately using student input as the basis for class work: In the same lesson, Madeline wrote down students' own reasons for wanting to study English and used them as the basis for a story which she brought to class the next day. They were thrilled to see that someone had listened to them: it was the first schooling experience these students had had where their own input was incorporated.

3) Sharing something of ourselves as teachers: Loren, who had just had a baby when she started teaching, brought pictures of her daughter, talked about her concerns as a new mother, and wrote about her daughter with her students. As she shared her own life as a parent, students felt more comfortable bringing their own pictures and stories into the classroom. The teacher-student roles were sometimes forgotten as everyone shared concerns as parents.

4) Using open-ended grammar exercises that invite student input: Teachers often provided focused grammar activities that left openings for students to share something of themselves; these activities give students a sense of security.

5) Giving students choice and control: If teachers formulate and ask all the questions, the traditional power relations of the classroom are reinforced. By letting students decide what they want to ask, they are given some control and can, at the same time monitor the issue of invasiveness. Ann started one of her classes by asking students to generate a list of questions that they wanted to use to find out about each other. Then they worked in pairs asking each other these and other questions. This simple modification of the traditional introductions activity allowed them to determine what they felt comfortable about asking and answering. Andy designed a lesson which allowed students to explicitly formulate their own guidelines for handling personal information in class (see p.98).

6)Drawing out cultural comparisons: Lessons which elicit information about the homeland are one of the most positive ways to develop students' sense of ownership. Exercises which start "In my country..." are an effective way to get this going. In our classes, teachers have, for example, used the occasion of American holidays as a lead into discussing other holidays; we have also explored differences in food, religious beliefs, folktales and fables.

7) Laughing: There aren't any formulas for this, but making sure there's time for joking and talking about things that *aren't* important is key. As teachers, we can set the tone for this by laughing at ourselves, pointing out our own mistakes and kidding with students. Ann's class, for example, spent one hilarious session just talking about what various animals say in different languages ("What does a rooster say in Haitian Creole?"). One of the biggest mistakes we can make is to try to force the class to focus only on heavy, loaded issues. This is a turn-off for students! They want their classes to be fun, enjoyable, relaxing. The irony is that it is precisely this that lets us get to the deeper issues: Making room for what's *not* important creates the space for people to bring up what *is* important.

8) Using pictures and graphics: Many of our start-up activities involve responding to, bringing in or creating graphics that bridge the world of the classroom and students' world outside the classroom. This is effective because it allows everyone to participate regardless of language level, contextualizing language through non-linguistic means.

Our History Book

One of our most successful introductory activities is using a booklet called Our History Book which presents a photo story of the life of an immigrant family. The booklet comes from English at Work: A Tool Kit for Teachers (Barndt 1986) and works well for a number of reasons: 1) it satisfies students' desire for "real" text material since it is a formal publication with accompanying exercises; 2) the format is clear and accessible, with large photos and a few lines of text per page; 3) its content is authentic and easy for students to relate to with photos of an actual family and the story of changes that immigration brought to their lives; 4) it serves as a simple, but powerful model for students' own stories both because of its form and its content: the story focuses on familiar issues and the pictures with handwritten captions are like those found in family photo albums.

Ann described the following sequence of activities in using Our History Book:

1. The whole class generated questions that they wanted to use to find out about each other.

2. They worked in pairs asking each other these and other questions.

3. They read Our History Book as a whole class and again in pairs.

4. They talked about their own experiences coming to the US, comparing their lives/countries with those in the story.

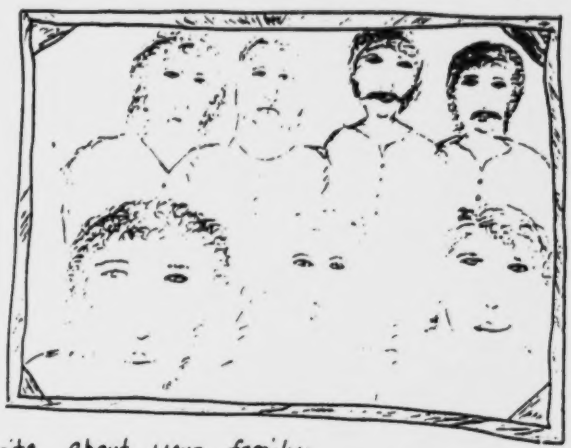
5. Ann made up question cards with scrambled words which students unscrambled and then answered (eg. "What did Aurelia bring? What did you bring?").

6. Students wrote their own histories in booklets that Ann had made up to simulate Our History Book.

Family Photos/Albums

Other forms of linking family photos and writing activities include inviting students to bring or draw pictures of their families or friends, introducing members and describing what they are doing, followed by either picture labeling (at lower levels) or written stories. It is important here to give students some choices (so that students who don't have families or don't have pictures of them won't feel left out/upset). Here a student drew a picture of himself because he didn't have a picture.

Please bring a picture of your family:



Write about your family:

My Family is This

I Have 1 My Mother not Father is Dead

I Have Three Sisters and Three Brothers

My Mother is Mas's Francisca I Have Otros

My Sister She see Jacqueline, and Carmela, an Francis

My Brothers They see Jose Alfredo, no Francisco

Loren did a variation on this activity: she found 99¢ pocket photo albums at the dime store and collected money to buy one for each student. She asked them to bring in any photos they wanted and put the pictures on the left hand side of the page with some writing on the right hand side. In this case, some students chose to bring magazine pictures rather than family photos. Loren brought her own pictures and did the writing along with students. As a lead in to the writing, students worked in pairs asking each other questions about the pictures (she said that she finds the responses much more interesting if she does NOT model the questions or elicit specific things about the pictures). When they're done, students put their own pictures with accompanying writing under the cellophane on each page, making a very polished-looking album for each student.

Family Trees

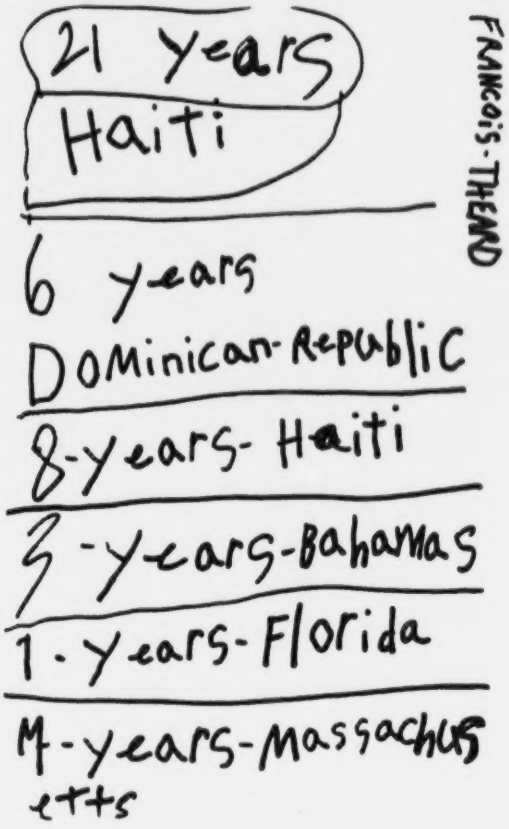
Another useful activity to link students' lives with a vocabulary and language development activity at low levels is drawing family trees. This activity does not require students to bring anything with them and can give teachers a clear sense of literacy levels early in the cycle. Here, the teacher can model by drawing a picture of his/her own family (although the danger of modeling is that students will draw their families to look like the teachers'). It may be more useful to provide a range of models - some simple stick figures, some from texts (eg. Carver and Fotinos, A Conversation Book: English in Everyday Life, Book Two, 2nd Ed. 1986:22). The following family tree was produced by one of Madeline's students.

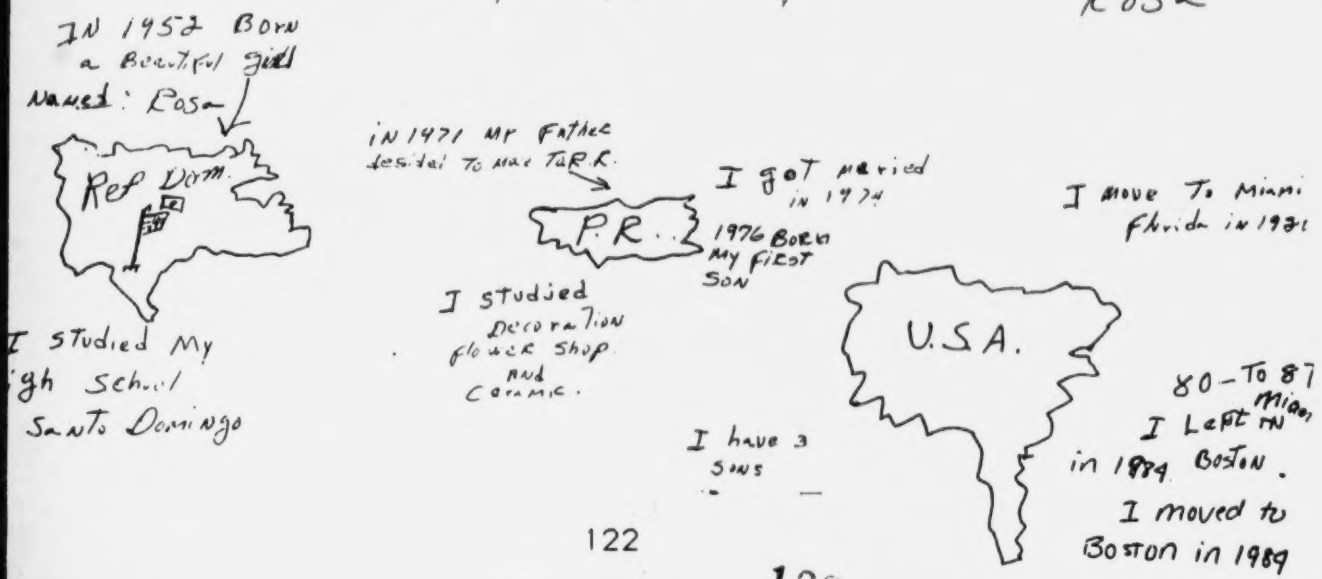
Life Journeys

Students can combine drawing and writing activities in describing their life journeys; this activity entails making a time line (or some kind of graphic representation) of the important events in one's life and then writing something about it. Again, this form leaves room for choice: some students may emphasize the graphic aspect while others may develop the writing more. A lesson which can be used to start and model your own life journey activity can be found in ESL for Action: Problem-Posing at Work (Auerbach and Wallerstein, 1987:6-7); it presents the life journey of a refugee named Manh and the story he wrote about it. The following is a description of the way Madeline developed the lesson on Manh's journey:

1. Students discussed Manh's life journey, focusing on wh-words.
2. The class generated a list of possible questions to ask someone about their lives.
3. They discussed the context for this type of question - where do people interview you, what kinds of interviews are there, what kinds of questions are OK to ask in which contexts, what kinds of answers are appropriate (safe) in which contexts.
4. Everyone looked at the questions they had generated and wrote down one they really wanted to ask.
5. Madeline modeled an interview: she taped a picture of a Vietnamese man on herself and said, "I'm Manh." She asked students to use their question to interview her. She taped the interview and asked students to listen to the tape.
6. The class voted on how they wanted to conduct their interviews (whole group vs. pairs). They chose to work in pairs, with various groupings (some who could both read and write answers, some who could read only and some who needed help with the whole process). Madeline worked with the group who needed help with the whole process and set up the tape with the group who could work independently but not write the answers.
7. Students interviewed each other.
8. Madeline transcribed the tape of the interview, making it into a reading activity for the class. Students commented on some misunderstandings about live/leave/left. Madeline wrote confusing sections on the board; the class discussed reasons for the confusion (the student thought all the questions were about the past because of the prior context of class discussion). This led to a discussion of why it's important to include past tense markers and how to indicate past/present in questions.

As you read the following life journeys, think about the themes that emerge for possible exploration.




My History = Rosa
IN 1952 Born a Beautiful girl Named: Rosa
Rep Dom.
I Studied My igh School Santo Domingo
IN 1971 My Father desided to move To P.R.
P.R.
I got maried in 1974
1976 Born My FIRST SON
I studied Decoration flower shop and Ceramic.
I have 3 sons
U.S.A.
I move To Miami Florida in 1978
80-To 87 Miami I Left NY in 1984 Boston.
I moved to Boston in 1989

CONSCIOUS LISTENING

In a participatory approach the teacher is always on the look-out for hot topics that emerge spontaneously when they are least expected. It is this kind of active listening between the lines which is probably the most powerful way of finding students' concerns. This means being tuned into the conversations that occur before and after class, the changes in mood (when students appear distracted, unusually quiet, sad or nervous), the reasons for absences and the times when students suddenly burst into their first languages.

It is important to be sensitive about issues identified in this way: students may not feel comfortable about sharing them with the class; at the same time, however, what appears as an individual problem very often touches others in the class in some form as well. In this case, the teacher's task is to find the underlying issue which can be generalized to others and to present it in a form that applies to the whole group without singling out the individual. The following are examples of themes that teachers in our project found through this kind of conscious listening:

*One day while Andy's class was discussing how they felt when they spoke English, she noticed a whispered side conversation between two students. When she asked whether they wanted to share what they were talking about, they recounted a story about being told to speak English in a store. This led to a heated discussion in Spanish about Anglo's fear of immigrants. Andy wrote up the story in English for the next day's lesson. The full account of how the class developed this theme is in Talking Shop ("Barbara and Ana").

*Themes can be identified from students' writing as well as conversation. In one of Loren's classes, students wrote dialogue journals. One day, a student wrote an entry about language use in her family, saying that her husband spoke to her in English but she spoke to him in Spanish because she didn't want him to see her mistakes. Loren recognized this as an issue of relevance to others in the class and asked the student's permission to copy it (not using her name) and share it with others. It became the starting point for an extensive sequence of activities on language use in the home and community (the code that Loren developed from this is in Chapter 6).

*Ann noticed that one of her students was upset one day; when she asked him about it, he mentioned that he had made a big mistake at work, ruining a machine because he had used the wrong chemical; he had misunderstood the directions and was worried that his minimal English would get him into more trouble. Ann didn't ask him to share this in class, but instead wrote the following story about the experience of a previous student who had gotten in trouble at work because of a language misunderstanding. By depersonalizing the situation and presenting it to the whole group, Ann created a context where everyone, including the man who was originally upset, could share their stories and strategies. Thus, in this case, an individual, private conversation became the basis for a literacy activity which in turn elicited exploration of a group theme. Through this discussion, the man was able to see that he was not alone and work on language skills to address his fears.

Please finish this story:

When Carmen came to this country, she worked as a housekeeper in Newton. One Saturday her boss, Mrs. James, cooked a lot of food for a dinner party. She cooked rice and chicken and she made salad. Carmen cleaned every room in the house.

After the party, there was a lot of food leftover. Mrs. James told Carmen to put the food away. Carmen didn't understand. She thought Mrs. James said, "Throw the food away." Carmen threw all the food in the garbage disposal. Mrs. James was furious!

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Verbs in the past tense		Vocabulary:	
came	told	housekeeper	put away
worked	said	boss	throw away
cooked	threw	dinner party	garbage disposal
made	thought	leftover	furious
cleaned	was		

GRAMMAR EXERCISES

Themes can also be elicited in the context of doing traditional-looking grammar activities. The advantage of these exercises is that they satisfy students' preconception of what they're "supposed to" be doing in class. A fill-in the blank or substitution format feels familiar and legitimate to students. Of course, the function of doing grammar work goes beyond eliciting themes; it fits at many different points in the participatory process. A cycle can move from grammar work to an issue or vice-versa. These exercises can be a catalyst for finding themes, a follow-up once themes have been found or an end in themselves. However grammar work is used and wherever it fits in, the key is to leave room for students to provide content from their own lives. For example:

*In my country/in the U.S.... can provide a frame for work on a variety of grammar points; this kind of cultural comparison leaves the door open for students to present information which is new while practicing structures determined by the teacher. As such, it is a communicative way to practice grammar. For example, they can work on there is/there are with count and non-count nouns by sentence completion exercises (*In my country, there are*_____. *In the U.S., there are* _____.)

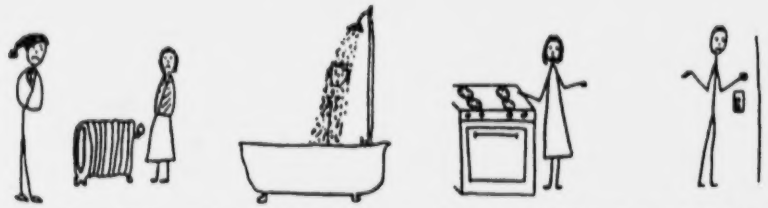
*A substitution drill format allows again for student content to be inserted in a controlled structure. In the following exercise, students can substitute their own problems once the pattern has been set.

Parent: I'd like to talk to you when you have time.
Teacher: What's the problem?
Parent: *I'm worried about Tien's homework.*
Teacher: Can we meet after school on Tuesday?

**I need, I want, I like, I can, I can't* charts can be used to elicit student concerns in the context of working on infinitives, gerunds and modals. For example:

I NEED	I WANT
to find a new apartment	to move to a safer place
to get a job	to learn how to drive
_____	_____
_____	_____

*Pictures like these from Preventive Mental Health in the ESL Classroom[1] can be a catalyst for students to practice the language for stating problems which may, in turn, lead to eliciting their own problems and discussing possible solutions.



There's no heat. There's no hot water. The stove is broken. The lock is broken.

*The vocabulary of feelings can provide one of the most productive contexts for finding themes, as the following examples show:

-Ann did a lesson in which students filled in the blank, *"I feel angry when_____."* Students drew pictures and wrote sentences to go with them. In pairs, they asked each other about their pictures and new issues came out (about difficulties at work).

-Loren did a collage activity while working on adjectives; she asked students to cut out pictures of people with different expressions on their faces (showing different emotions). Then students pasted these pictures onto file folders without labeling them. Each student then held up her own collage and led the class by eliciting adjectives.

-Andy did a sequence of activities on feelings combining pictures and sentence formation. She began by showing students photos depicting various emotions and eliciting vocabulary they already knew. This process was interspersed with stories, memories and associations that the pictures evoked. She then presented two sets of cards, one with feeling words and the other with causes or situations that began with "when____." Students then went through a series of steps to match the sets of cards, making "I feel ____ when_____" sentences. Andy included sentences about classroom interactions so that students could discuss "positive and negative feelings about the only experience we all universally shared - our class time together." Finally students made their own sentences. She describes this sequence in detail in the Talking Shop ("Expressing Feelings").

[1]See Resources for ordering information.

*Charts like this one from English at Work: A Tool Kit for Teachers,[2] can be used to elicit content from students' lives and can then become a framework for both grammar activities (eg. tense work) and finding student concerns.

IMMIGRATION

NAME	Where are you from?	How long in Canada?	Why did you come?	Do you like Canada? Why?
Antoni	Poland	3 years 3 months	- family - problems in Poland	Yes. More food and clothes in Canada.
Ricky	Hong Kong	3½ years	family	No. more gambling in Hong Kong. more fun in Hong Kong. here, sleep, work, sleep and work. lonely Yes, easy to make money in Canada.
Lee	Hong Kong	9 years	family	yes, freedom in Canada. my children like Canada more than me.
Si Heng	China	3 years	family	yes, Canada is a free country.
Lorena	Ecuador	6 years	son	Yes, not too much. I like my country
Ah Ying	Hong Kong	5 years	son sponsored me	Yes, easier to save money When I have money, I can go back

[2]Distributed by the CORE Foundation; see Resources for ordering information.

CLASS RITUALS

Another way to integrate an ongoing system for finding themes is by instituting activities that occur on a regular basis each day or week. These can range from a daily ten minute period when students talk about anything they're thinking about to Monday reports on the activities of the weekend. Calling these "Good News/Bad News" can open the way for students to include not just social activities but also concerns and issues. Teachers can post newsprint on the wall for students to report ideas, events or questions as a kind of "Posted Journal." (see Sauve 1987:58). This kind of ritual serves a number of functions besides uncovering themes. Newsletters can become reading texts, writing activities evaluation tools.

*Madeline started each Monday class by writing students' news on newsprint. Sometimes students talked about their weekends; sometimes they focused on news from their home countries. These accounts become the basis of immediate in-class literacy work; Madeline then wrote them up in newspaper format for use in the next class. During one such discussion, students started talking about money and the high cost of living. Madeline transcribed the discussion and brought the text on the facing page to the next class. After the students read this newspaper, the discussion turned to wages and why some students' were paid so much less than others. Another issue emerged from this discussion - the extremely loaded and personal issue of green cards. This theme, in turn became the content for the following literacy class. Madeline describes the full cycle in Talking Shop ("No Green Cards").

*Andy's developed a "Class Accomplishments" Newsletter which recounted the events of the past week for Monday classes. In it she reported grammar points that were covered, issues that were discussed and even class attendance. The newsletter served several functions: it was a review and summary for students who had been absent; it helped students become more conscious of attendance issues (even causing attendance to rise). She describes it more fully in the Talking Shop ("Our Class").

*Charo posted a piece of newsprint on the wall which students used to report their daily accomplishments both in and out of class. They wrote on it whenever they felt that they had achieved something that they wanted to report. This became a form of student self-evaluation (see Chapter 8).

GOOD NEWS NEWSPAPER MARCH 22,1989

cccccc$MONEY$ccccc$c

MARIE-ANNETTE SAID,

"EVERYTHING IN AMERICA IS EXPENSIVE NOW."

"IN 1981 HOUSE IS CHEAPER."

BEFORE, SHE LIVED IN CENTRAL SQUARE ON WESTERN AVE.

SHE HAD 2½ BEDROOMS AND A BIG KITCHEN.

SHE PAID $140.

BOSTON APARTMENTS ARE THE MOST EXPENSIVE IN THE USA.

MARIE-JEAN SAID,

BOSTON IS EXPENSIVE BECAUSE IT GOT WORK."

MARIE-ANNETTE SAID,

"HOUSE EXPENSIVE. EVERYTHING EXPENSIVE,

BUT JOBS DON'T PAY WELL."

MARIE-JEAN SAID,

JOBS PAY WELL: $7, $8, $9.

MARIE-ANNETTE SAID,

"HOUSE GOES UP.EVERYTHING GOES UP.

JOBS GO UP. BUT NOT ENOUGH.
cccccc

STUDENT RESEARCH: Adapting Ethnographic Approaches

One of the ways that needs and concerns can be identified with students is by encouraging them to become researchers of their own lives. This means that they ask questions, collect data from their environment, analyze and reflect on the data and then decide what (if anything) to pursue. Specifically, when this kind of research focuses on language and literacy use in the home, community and workplace, it can become both a needs assessment tool and a vehicle for developing the very practices being investigated, in addition to being a tool for finding themes.

The notion of involving students in research about their own language and literacy use is inspired by the work of Heath and Branscombe (1984). They taught a class of adolescent students who had been labeled 'special needs' to become ethnographers in their own communities, investigating language use and literacy practices. Through this process the students' academic literacy developed to the point that most of them were able to move into college-preparatory classes. Heath claimed that this approach was successful because language and literacy were both the instrument and the object of study: in the process of exploring language/literacy practices (as the object of study), they developed new ones (using them as the instrument of study). Similarly, Lytle's (1986) work in developing an alternative approach to adult literacy assessment draws from the ethnographic tradition, involving students in in-depth interviews about the actual situations, occasions, types of texts, social contexts and purposes for reading and writing in their lives.

As we read these studies (which focused primarily on first language literacy), we tried to determine what was and wasn't relevant for our own teaching situations (working with adult second language learners at early stages of literacy development). While the conceptual framework of these studies was enticing, we had doubts about the possiblity of putting this approach into practice because of the lack of a common language within classes and the relatively early stages of ESL/literacy of many of the students. However, as we identified the features of the ethnographic approach (outlined in Chapter 2) which contributed to its success, we realized that it corresponded in many ways to our participatory approach. Beyond the general ways that our orientation corresponds to this approach, there were a number of particular types of activities that we adapted:

1) <u>Home research activities on a range of topics</u>:
By carrying out simple investigations about daily life, students very often identify issues of concern.

*Madeline asked her students to keep a log of all the foods they ate during one week. In the reporting back session, the issue of alar came up: students had heard reports about apples being unsafe and wanted to know more about the reasons. They did a collaborative language experience story followed by readings and discussion of alar.

2) <u>In-class activities to investigate literacy/language practices/beliefs:</u> Rather than doing extensive individual interviews about literacy practices, contexts and, attitudes (described by Lytle, as an alternative assessment instrument), we integrated activities to elicit similar information in an ongoing way into instructional content with the whole class.

*Andy used a picture of the hands of an old person copying the letters of the alphabet to motivate writing about literacy. The students wrote stories about people they knew who couldn't read and write. A theme which emerged from this was social vs. individual literacy: students said that you need literacy if you're alone and have to take care of yourself; you need it less if you have families/people you can depend on.

*Ann overheard a conversation about children's negative attitudes toward their first language and developed a code to investigate this issue further (see p. 161). This provided an impetus for exploration of attitudes to the first language.

3) <u>Linking in-class activities with home/community investigation of language/literacy use:</u> students discuss some aspect of their own language/literacy practices/beliefs in class and then do further investigation/reflection at home; they then develop their ideas through literacy activities. On the next pages are examples of investigating home contexts for doing homework and language choice/use. Chapter 8 presents a list of possible areas and questions for a language use inventory.

Research on contexts for doing homework: Students investigated their home contexts for doing homework in several classes, using the following code to catalyze discussion:

Parent: Do you have homework today?

Child: Yes, but I need help. The teacher told us to ask our parents for help.

Parent: Hmmm, let's see.

Child: What does that say?

Parent: Hmmm, The...little...girl?

Child: What's the matter, Mom?

Parent: Don't rush me.

Although each of the classes used a similar catalyst, the issues which emerged were different for every class. In Ann's class, students focused being tired and having too much housework as factors interfering with helping children with homework; in Loren's class the focus was more on issues of communication with the school and understanding report cards[3]; in Madeline's class students talked about having to hide their literacy problems from their children to maintain respect and, at the same time, devising ways of helping their children even if they could not read. One student said,

> "If he tell them, they don't pay attention to learn because they know the father no see the homework. Like me. Before I'm ashamed. My kids don't know I no know how to read. Only my son who finished high school. And I tell him he have to keep the secret. He says, "Mommy, I don't believe it. The way you touch my book? The way you look my homework?" I say, "I have to help you."

Emerging from this discussion, the parents generated a list of ways that they help their children with homework despite reading problems and ways their children help them.

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[3]Loren gives a detailed account of the cycle of activities involved in this investigation in her class in Talking Shop, "Homework Codes."

Research on language choice/use: Students investigated who uses which language with whom. In the process of exploring this question, themes about family dynamics and roles emerged:

from journal entries

... when I say some words wrong she corrects me. And sometimes I ask her how to say the word and she tells me I help her with her spanish homework because she takes a class in spanish in her school. I feel very happy that she helps me, and that she knows good English Sometimes she laughs at me, and I laugh too.

My husband speaks to me in a Spanish in my home because he speaks English in his work and in the street. where does he work national school Bus Service.

My husband does not speak English at home. He makes me feel stupid in the home.

I'm understand but I dont want to speak English at home.

I am pregnat. I go to the hospital every 2 weeks I understand English when My doctor speaks slowly

PHOTOS, READING AND WRITING CATALYSTS

More open-ended catalyst activities can include asking students to respond to photographs, reading selections, and writing assignments (or some combination of these) in any way they choose. Students should be given choices about what they want to respond to ("Choose one picture/poem you would like to write about.") and asked minimally guiding questions like "What do you see here?" "What does this picture/poem make you think of?" "How do you feel about this picture/poem?""Write something about this picture/poem." Chapter 6 describes in more detail ways of introducing and using photos, readings and writing assignments.

Responding to Photos: Photos can be presented singly, in pairs of contrasting pictures or in thematically-based groups. Good sources of these photos are books like the Family of Man, Family of Woman as well as calendars from organizations like UNESCO, Oxfam, etc. Loren often gave her students two pictures of families, each with smiling people but from different cultures; her instructions for writing were minimal. Here she discusses her rationale:

> I purposefully did not design a set of problem-posing questions to go with the pictures because I wanted to see how [students] would read these images without my guidance. I wanted to give them the option of staying in a more labeling or describing mode or to go into a more critical one. I wanted to know if a code could stand by itself without all those probing questions. What I discovered was that, yes, the pictures could stand alone, but it depended on the makeup of the class as to whether they chose to go deeper. It also depended on the level of English since this was not a bilingual class.

She describes the different ways students chose to respond to them in Talking Shop ("Happy Families?"). In one case, the photos served as a rich mine for uncovering issues, while in another they were less productive. About the latter, Loren says, "The use of the pictures provided the backdrop for us to discuss such important issues as: What is happiness? What is wealth? Are these things different in different cultures? Is having money equivalent to being happy? Are people really richer here in the U.S.? Is it better to be rich or happy?"

Responding to Readings: Readings can be used to elicit student reactions and related experiences or as models for students' own writing. Here Ann gave her students a poem to read; then she asked them to respond to it with their own poems.

Little Lyric (of Great Importance)

I wish the rent
was heaven sent

-Langston Hughes

Here are some of the poems they wrote after reading it:

I wish tomorrow is a nice day with a blue sky.
And the birds are singing and ever body is happy.
I wish to have a nice car and a house.
I wish to go to college and have good job
In the future
I wish I have my parent and my brother
Here.
I wish I can speak every language.
Bay Sitthirath

I wish I can go back
To my country
Not come
Back anymore
Soutchalith Banthilivong

I wish to eat foods that my
Mother make.
I wish to feel more happy.
Pedro Jucoski

I wish to go to a river with a lot of grass,
Wooded, blue sky, and it has a sidewalk.
To run and to run,
And to listen to the voice of
The water in the river. I think about
All the world and its wonderful things.
Clara Bowley

Ann typed each poem on a separate sheet and collated them into a class anthology.

Writing Exercises: Themes can also emerge from student writing, either unexpectedly or as a result of a directed catalyst activity. Dialogue journals are an important place for teachers to get a sense of what is important in students' lives (the section on codes in Chapter 6 for examples of issues identified in this way). Open-ended writing assignments can also lead to the uncovering of themes. In these exercises, students are asked to write about some topic with minimal guidance. The following example is one student's response to the assignment, **"Write about whatever you see when you look out your window."** Think about the issues uncovered here as you read the following passage:

...First this is what I told about myself when I finish doing my things around the house. I go to the window and I distract my mind by looking outside. I do that because it is a habit to me. First I don't watch TV. I don't read anything in my house. I don't know why but I don't like to do any of the above. I don't have any time to do that. For me to look out the window is like watching TV. When the police is talking to drug sellers, for me that is very interesting. It is almost every day that this happens. In my mind I think many things when I see these things. I think this is not going to ever stop. The thing that worries me the most is my family, my son, my daughters. This is going to be like that and no one is going to stop it except god. This is like a nightmare.

A Tapestry of Themes

A concern often voiced about Freire-inspired, participatory ESL is that it may focus too much on problems and thus be negative or depressing for students. Teachers at workshops about problem-posing rightfully point out that students don't want to think about their problems all the time. However, if teachers genuinely listen to students and center curriculum around content that comes from their lives, this ceases to be an issue. In fact, once the tone has been set, and students feel that they will be listened to, a rich and unpredictable texture of themes begins to emerge: dealing with very loaded, global social and political issues is only one aspect of this dynamic. The following minutes from one particular week during our Project gives a sense of the incredible range of issues that can emerge when this process is put into practice.

Charo: Students in the literacy class at Villa Victoria [a housing development] asked Charo why their Chinese neighbors are celebrating the New Year now, In addition, one of the students has been sick; others have been talking about how sick people manage when they live alone. One woman who lives in V.V. has taken on the role of assisting anyone who is sick - visiting them and cooking for them. Students have decided to use these two issues as topics for their community newsletter. One student will interview Chinese residents about their New Year's celebration; another will interview the woman who watches out for sick people.

Ann: One of Ann's students brought in a letter for others to sign about the closing of Brighton High (a High School with a large bilingual program). She is a Guatemalan woman who doesn't have kids in the high school now but thinks it's important for the whole community to respond. The discussion revolved around why we should do anything even if we're not directly affected. One of the Russian men said he didn't want to talk about it because it didn't concern him; several others argued that it's important because if they cut this program, they'll cut others too (like adult ed classes!); that if high school students lose this school, they'll drop out which will lead to more crime, unemployment and drug use all of which will affect the safety and well-being of everyone else in the community. Others were interested because they had grandchildren at the school; one has a son who is a teacher there. Ann and several students will go to another meeting and get petitions in Vietnamese.

Andy: Three of the women in her class do cleaning work so she'll focus on that next week. While she was visiting her sister in Phoenix last week, there was a "sighting" of the Virgin of Guadelupe; community people built a shrine around the tree where she was seen. This was puzzling for Andy and her sister, so she asked her class about it; after discussing it, they wrote a letter explaining the whole phenomenon to her sister.

Madeline: Her morning class has been working on the solar system. This came up after a student brought in calendars for everyone following a discussion of the lunar calendar which in turn arose from a discussion on cultural differences in celebrating holidays. The calendars had pictures of the new moon, full moon, etc. After some calendar reading activities, students began to ask about how the solar system works (why the moon is full sometimes, etc.). Madeline organized a people model (with students as different planets,etc.) to illustrate the concept of orbits. One woman said she still doesn't believe it and wondered how astronomers know all this - they don't live in the sky and can't see it. This led to a discussion of what you can see in the sky which in turn led to a Vietnamese student telling a folktale that her grandfather used to tell about life after death: After your death you'll be judged if your life has been good or bad. You'll have to walk up the rainbow; it's very hot and if you've been bad, you'll fall off it and be eaten by a tiger or a big fish; If you've been good, you'll be able to walk across the entire rainbow and get to the other side.

In another class, the phrase, "I'm thinking about…" emerged from a reading. One student especially liked this phrase and started talking about what she was thinking about (a daughter who she's separated from). For homework, M. asked everyone to write down a few things they're thinking about. One student came back with a list of ten things she was thinking about. M. asked her if she could share the list with the class; the student agreed and M. read it to the others, asking if they had any questions for the author. At this point, the student took charge, saying, "Yes, you should ask me questions." M. was moved by how strongly she took over, understanding that she had written something that was worth asking about and that she was an author who had something to offer others.

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After reading these minutes, you might want to make a list of the themes, how each one emerg, and how it was developed. Now think back on themes from your own classes and do the same.

Core Issues: We identified the following issues through collaborative investigation with our students; our sense is that these are probably core issues for many refugees and immigrants in family literacy programs.

Home culture: holidays, cooking, witchcraft, faith healing, folktales, schooling in home-land, religion, weather/climate,employment, family structure, childhood memories

Children's schooling:

safety: violence in schools and getting to/from school

discipline (or lack of it): culturally different approaches to discipline; parents being accused of child abuse, feeling schools aren't strict enough; punishing children for poor school behavior/performance

fairness/discrimination: feeling child is being treated unfairly, neglected

content/quality of education: fear that schools aren't teaching enough, lack of communication about what's going on in school, implications of use of basal readers

homework: ways of helping, feelings of inadequacy

obstacles to involvement: with children's education, schools: time (overtime, two jobs); living conditions (homelessness, lack of heat, crowding; other concerns (immigration, family problems, health)

ways of being involved: importance of showing concern, advocacy

bilingual education: ambivalence (fear of loss of home language and culture; fear of exclusion from mainstream; fear that bilingual education is inferior, segregates children, prevents acquisition of English); lack of involvement in decisions about placement

social/cultural concerns: fear about influence of American ways (smoking, drugs, sex, skipping school, etc.); fear of loss of culture and control; conflict between home and school values; children's negative feelings about home language/culture

parent/teacher roles: teachers asking for more parental support; parents feeling it's the teacher's job

special needs: disagreeing with school evaluations and placements; understanding procedures, rights, implications of special needs placements

school atmosphere: feeling unwelcome, not knowing/feeling comfortable with school authorities

communication: inability to communicate because of language, lack of translation, inability to understand notes, report cards, etc; only negative communications from school

afterschool/vacation/holiday care: problems finding care for children of working parents; finding positive things for children to do while parents are at work; adequacy of day/afterschool care, availability and cost of childcare

access: school closing, school assignment plans, fears about busing, distance from home

Parents' education/literacy:

educational background: school stories, conceptions of learning/literacy

adult literacy: reasons for coming to school, expectations, uses of language/ literacy, the importance/meaning of literacy

classroom dynamics: use of L1 vs. L2 in class, attendance, student/ teacher roles, role of personal issues, evaluation of learning

homework: contexts for doing it; help from children, obstacles to doing it

participation in sites: hiring teachers, evaluation, funding cuts, childcare

Immigration: Reasons for coming, problems with authorities, hazardous journeys, political/economic situation in homeland, new immigration laws, amnesty and employment implications

Family:

mens'/womens' roles: housework, work outside the home, education, language use; tensions created by changing roles in new culture

parent/child roles: reversals, loss of respect/authority/control, parents' dependence on children; children as link to new culture, parents' hope; children feeling burdened; mutual support of parents and children, women's independence; mothering; parents as teachers, separation from children;

language use in the home: contexts for L1 vs. L2 use; attitudes toward L1, emotional significance of language choice; ways of maintaining L1/culture

Neighborhood/Community: safety, loneliness, lack of safe play space for children, mutual support and sense of community (or lack of it); ways of helping neighbors; community issues (school closing, police harrassment); tensions between cultural groups, racism and discrimination

Housing: finding a place to live, high rents, lack of repairs, overcrowding, lack of heat, condo conversions, tensions with neighbors, understanding cultures of neighbors

Health care: AIDS; nutrition, Alar in apples, birth control, lead paint, drugs, drug abuse

Work: low pay, having to work two jobs, fear of losing job and not finding new one (immigration law), workers' rights, employers' rights, language problems at work

Welfare: requirements, impact on motivation and self-esteem, reasons for being on welfare, negative attitudes toward welfare

Political Issues: Political situations in home countries, English Only legislation, cuts in services, immigration legislation

Chapter 6

TOOLS: Developing Curriculum around Themes

The participatory process doesn't stop when students' concerns have been identified. The next question becomes, quite simply, ***"What do you do with themes once you find them?"*** Students may feel that the heated discussions which arise in response to a catalyst are 'diversions' - that they're interesting but don't count as *real* language work. Our experience has been that the key to legitimizing this kind of spontaneous talk is the follow-up - consciously keeping track of the 'diversions' and developing literacy activities from them. Of course, the kind of follow-up for any given theme will depend on an interaction between the teacher, the topic and the students. Very often teachers only discover what's appropriate and engaging for students through a process of experimentation, trying and evaluating as they go.

What teachers need, thus, is not a set method or sequence of activities, but what Barndt calls a "Tool Kit" of techniques, procedures and activities from which to draw in deciding how to develop themes as they are indentified. As Barndt (1986) says,

> *These tools, are like shovels and picks, to keep you digging away at the rich resources of experience which all adult learners have. They are to help you 'mine' the gems of everyday life that become the content of adult learning.*

The essence of the concept of tools is that students' experience can best be explored through the use of concrete representations of that experience which provide a focus for language work, social analysis and change. In a participatory classroom, tools are much more than the traditional paper and pencil activities: they are often visual, non-verbal instruments which generate active responses, thinking, and dialogue. Their aim is to engage and draw out students.

This concept of tools, originating in Freire's work, has been adapted to ESL in various ways. Barndt uses the term to mean primarily non-textual representations of an issue, because, as she says, (1987:13):

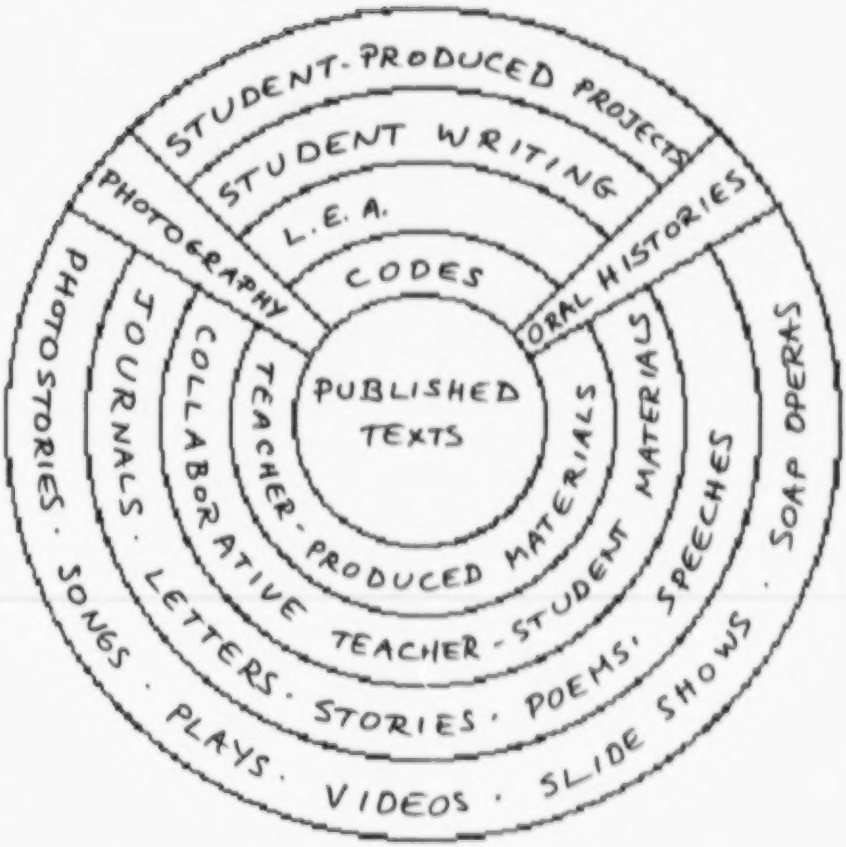
> *When we use only verbal motivators to teach language like a text ...we keep the focus on what is unknown or uncomfortable to the new speaker of English. A nonverbal tool - like a photograph, a song, or an object - can engage the interest of the student and motivate him or her to talk about a particular theme, taking the focus away from the language issue.*

Wallerstein's (1983) codes - pictures or texts representing themes - are another kind of tool; her method entails following the presentation of each code with a structured 5-step questioning process (see p. 160). Our own experience is that this format doesn't always work: it may seem too teacher-controlled or narrow in form and direction. The use of other tools opens up this process and provides a greater variety of ways to explore an issue; codes become one possible format among many.

We use the term tool to refer not just to the representation of an issue, but to all the ways of developing themes, combining visual and non-visual, verbal and non-verbal, textual and non-textual. Tools fall into three categories: those that the teacher chooses from a pre-existing source, those that the teacher creates, and those that students are involved in creating. The goal is to move increasingly toward student-created tools. For any given theme, a combination of tools may be used, perhaps starting with a pre-existing source, continuing with a teacher-written text, and going on to a collaborative or student-created tool. In addition, tools may become increasingly student-controlled as a class cycle develops through various themes.

The task of choosing/creating tools as new themes emerge is an ongoing one. Thus, when we talk about tools, we are talking about both **process** and **product**, about both the model for generating tools and the particular forms they take for a given theme. In this chapter, the focus is on 'how' more than 'what' - on the generic processes for creating tools rather than actual tools resulting from that process. The chart on the following page represents an overview of the tools that will be described in this chapter.

PARTICIPATORY TOOLS
for extending language and literacy around student themes



presented along a continuum from most teacher-controlled to most student-controlled

What are the functions of tools?

In looking at this chart, it immediately becomes apparent that the distinction between Ways In and Tools is, in many ways, an artificial one. First, the tools that are used in the follow-up phase may look very much like those used to find themes: texts, photos, or journals may be used in both cases. Second, the line between finding a theme and exploring it further in the classroom is fuzzy: there is not usually a separation between how something emerges and language/literacy work around it. Nonetheless, this distinction is useful because it leaves a conceptual space between identifying an issue and building curriculum around it: while the Tools may be similar in form to the Ways In, their functions are very different. Where the purpose of the Ways In is to uncover what's 'hot,' the purpose of the Tools is to extend language/literacy proficiency while deepening the analysis of the issues. Barndt calls this the difference between "scratching the surface" and "digging deeper."

The dual functions of the Tools - both working on language and developing themes on a conceptual level - go hand in hand and cannot be divorced. If either aspect is ignored, the fundamental premise of a participatory approach (that language/literacy instruction should help people to address issues and make changes) is undermined. If a meaningful issue is reduced to mechanical follow-up exercises which focus only on skills, the original motivation for working on language and literacy is lost. Students get the message that content from their lives has little value except as a pretext for language practice. By the same token, if issues are left at the level of discussion, and no explicit attention is paid to language work, students may feel that their linguistic needs are being ignored; since for many talk doesn't count as legitimate language instruction, they may feel that they're not getting their money's worth. Thus, the tools structure the link between the development of language/literacy and analysis/action.

Tools serve the additional function of providing a framework for increasing student participation in curriculum development. As students feel more comfortable, they become involved in the process of producing tools themselves; teacher-created tools become models for student-created tools. Thus, the same form may appear at different points in the curriculum development process, serving different functions and involving different degrees of student participation. The chart on the following page shows how photographs can be used as tools serving different functions at various points in the curriculum development process.

Uses of Photography (from Ways In to Tools)

Photos as Ways In - setting the tone: Students bring photos of their families, home countries, homes, neighborhoods as a way of introducing themselves and their concerns.

Photos as Catalysts: Teachers present pictures without accompanying texts as a way to identify themes and elicit student reactions; students select pictures that they would like to respond to (orally or in writing).

Photos as context for readings: Teachers present pictures with texts as a way to elicit prior knowledge (through pre-reading exercises), or provide non-linguistic information and contextual cues.

Photos as codes: Teachers select a picture or pictures to develop a pre-identified issue with guiding questions. Here the picture represents a problematic theme from students' lives.

Photos as frames for teacher-written stories/LEA Stories: Teachers present photos for discussion; students either dictate the story (LEA) or the teacher writes it based on the discussion; the story becomes a text.

Photos as frames for student-writing: Students go through the stages of the writing process in response to photos (either teacher- or student-selected).

Published photo-stories: A series of photos that tell a story can be presented in a variety of ways:

1) with a pre-determined text and follow-up exercises to relate it to students' lives/finish the story/react/rewrite the story;
2) in sequence but without text; students develop the text; individuals or groups can write texts, compare them and act out the stories;
3) out of sequence (in random order); groups can work out their own stories, putting pictures in sequence and developing their own texts.

Individual/Class photography: Students and/or the teacher take pictures inside or outside class (at work, in neighborhoods, homes, schools) and write about them individually or collaboratively.

Student-produced photo-stories: The class creates a photo-story as a kind of action: inside the classroom, students decide on a theme, act it out, take pictures and write accompanying text; outside the classroom, they identify a community issue, take pictures and create a text. By developing alternative endings/trying out different solutions, photo-stories can be a tool for addressing a problem. The product can become a tool for others in addressing related issues.

As you look at this picture, think about what issue or issues it represents for students and how you might use it at different points in the curriculum development process:

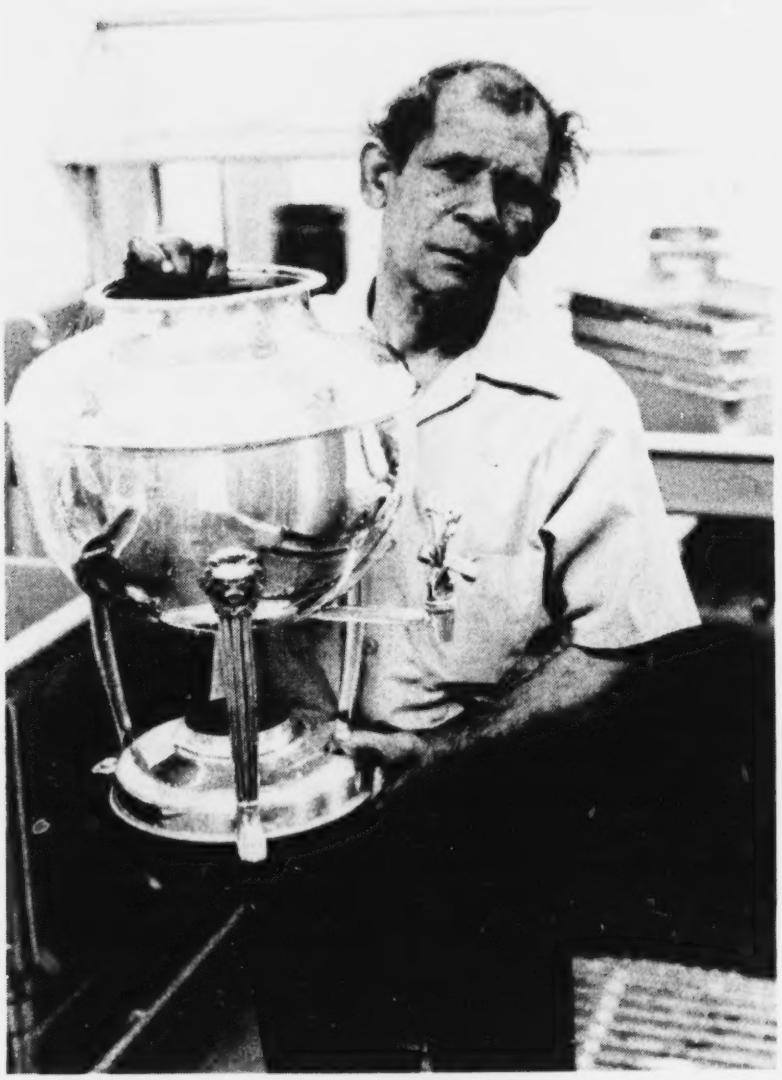


photo by Tony Loreti

What teaching issues arise in using tools?

The transition from finding a theme to doing something with it isn't always a smooth one. Students may bring up a concern which you as a teacher are uncomfortable with. Or so many themes may come up that you feel overwhelmed. How do you know which to follow up on and which to drop? If a discussion gets hot, how do you bring in a language focus? How do you move day-to-day concerns to the level of social analysis?

Again, there are no prescriptions for handling these questions: certainly there's no rule that you need to follow-up on every concern raised by students or that the follow-up must be immediate. Teachers often decide not to pursue an issue when it first comes up because it is an interruption of something important, because they is unsure how to handle it, or because students' energy doesn't sustain itself. The same issue may present itself weeks later, in another context where follow-up does make sense; or the class may never get back to it. Part of the challenge of a participatory approach is knowing when to pursue a theme, when to drop it and when to come back to it. This is an art which develops over time through experimentation.

The most important thing to remember is that you don't have to decide how to handle these teaching issues by yourself. Both your students and your colleagues are invaluable resources. In addition to teacher sharing, making the curriculum development process explicit to students by talking about choices all along the way can lay the groundwork for deciding what to do when particular issues arise. As you read these examples of teacher issues and suggestions for handling them, compare them to situations you have been in and think about how you handled/might handle them.

If a theme seems overwhelming..focus on a limited aspect.

Madeline showed us a photo of an Ethiopian woman and her child that she wanted to use, but was concerned that it might raise the issue of parents' separation from kids: it is so big and hard to address that it may cause a feeling of hopelessness. In fact, when Madeline showed this picture to her students, it triggered a long and emotional account of one woman's life which was moving and engaging for the others; just the act of telling her story served an important function for this woman and the class. At the same time, it is important to find issues that are not so big that students feel helpless - issues where there are possibilities for addressing the problem in some way that may create change. The story about the parking ticket in Chapter 4 is one example of this kind of theme.

If a theme seems too hot or loaded....approach it indirectly. Sometimes removing an issue from its immediate manifestation helps students feel more control or choice about addressing it. Madeline knew that the political situation in Haiti was very much on her students' minds, but because of deeply-rooted fears of talking about politics, they might be reluctant to raise it in class. She approached the subject by introducing a reading on Laos. As students read, an Iranian woman drew a picture of torture in Iran and the discussion moved quickly and naturally to the events in Haiti. The class dictated a story about the elections.

If a hot issue arises unexpectedly...focus on language work to defuse the issue. Sometimes a focus on form and skills work can provide distance from the topic, at the same time providing space for students to decide when to come back to its content. This approach allows students to reflect on the issue through a 'safe' exercise while satisfying their need to feel that classtime is devoted to language instruction. Specifically, when a discussion arises that is hot or confusing for you as a teacher you can always start by transcribing it (as an LEA story - see p. 166). This defuses things, provides a concrete literacy focus and stalls for time as you figure out what to do next.

If you, as the teacher, aren't clear about how to address a problem...act as a problem-poser rather than a problem-solver. Teachers often feel that they have to have the answers, and steer away from problems that they can't help to solve. Since problem-posing is not designed to solve problems, but rather to explore their causes and enable students to develop their own solutions, teachers don't have to have all the answers. Rather, what's important is facilitating discussion and providing resources without prescribing solutions. In family literacy classes, this dilemma may especially arise around questions of parenting, because of implicit value judgements. No one wants to get into who is or isn't being a good parent. Teachers, in particular are often in no position to understand the conflicts of raising children in a new culture. At the same time, parents are groping and want direction. It makes sense to look at parenting problems not in terms of do's and don'ts, but in terms of sharing experiences and making resources available. This might mean developing a code to elicit students' concerns about parenting and using these as a way into workshops or experience-sharing rather than acting as experts on parenting.

If an issue seems too personal...situate it in a broader context. When Ann's student was very preoccupied with a problem at his job (see p. 124), she didn't want to let the issue drop but also didn't want to focus on that person. She removed the issue from the student's particular situation by writing a code about the general problem, inviting other students to bring out related experiences, compare them and address them together. By finding how individual problems relate to common concerns, the teacher can situate seemingly personal problems to a broader context.

If you're not sure whether to pursue an issue...involve students in decision-making. Charo felt that it would be important to follow up on the stories about knives in school and safety concerns, but when she suggested activities to develop this theme, students seemed to clam up; their responses shifted to issues of bus safety and communication with teachers. Since one of the goals is to increase student control and involvement, sharing your concerns about what to do and asking students to help decide the direction (providing some choices or leaving it more open-ended) accomplishes two things at once: it takes the heat off the teacher and it increases students' engagement with the process.

If students' analysis of an issue differs from yours...listen, express your perspective and let go of your expectations. Very often in our efforts to link daily concerns to social analysis, we try to draw students toward particular interpretations or understandings of issues. In one case, for example, Andy presented a code about racism as a result of some comments about Blacks that emerged in her class. She wrote two stories, one about two Black men following a woman, the other about a Black man who was beaten up by some White kids while visiting a friend in East Boston. Andy hoped that students would compare the situations, talk about what racism is, where it comes from and how to deal with it. Instead they talked about ways to be safe (eg. not walking alone at night). In changing student-teacher roles, letting go of control may mean that discussions or activities don't always go the way you plan; moreover, this may be a positive sign, rather than a sign of failure. It may mean that a new issue is raised which is more important to them or that the original issue was really your issue and not theirs. Or it may be that a seed has been planted that students will return to later when they're ready. In any case, teachers need to express their own perspective as co-participants while at the same time seeing student responses as a reflection of where they are and accepting them as such.

Examples of putting the principles into practice...

Many of Ann's students were concerned about the impact of the new immigration law. Ann wrote a story about a woman from El Salvador with no papers who needed a job but was scared to look for one. The story and questions focused on the use of modals. Then there was a True/False opinion quiz about what the woman should do. This led to a heated discussion about alternatives in different situations. Ann followed this with the question, "Who do you think should have the right to live here?" Then students did a role play using cards Ann had made up taking the parts of the President, an employer and people from other countries.

In this situation Ann used a teacher-written story as a tool to approach a theme of common concern indirectly, framed the issue in a language exercise, elicited rather than imposed alternative ways of addressing the problem, led the discussion to a broader level of analysis, situating individual's concerns in a social context and involved students in creating their own tool (the socio-drama) as they developed ways of addressing the problem. She went back and forth between a content focus and a language focus, moving toward increasing student participation.

When Madeline brought an activity designed to generate student stories about their homelands, her students refused to do it, saying that they were tired of talking about themselves and wanted to work on grammar. She obliged by writing a story about her own Thanksgiving vacation with past tense exercises. This prompted students to talked for the entire two hours about holidays and religion in their countries. What was interesting to her was the fact that even though they said that they didn't want to tell their stories anymore, they couldn't stop telling them: even the "real English lessons" got back to their stories.

In this case, the students' refusal to do a participatory activity paradoxically was an indication of the success of the model: they felt comfortable and in control enough to tell their teacher exactly what they wanted to do. By following their lead, sharing the decision-making, focusing on language work and letting go of her own expectations, Madeline opened the door for students to get to issues of importance to them and legitimated the process.

PUBLISHED TEXTS

A common complaint of teachers is that existing ESL literacy texts are boring: it's hard to find materials that are both simple and interesting enough for low level students. Our experience has been that finding appropriate materials is largely a matter of looking in the right places: there is a wealth of material available from non-traditional sources - authentic texts written for a purpose other than teaching ESL. We have found that *content* is more important than *level* in determining students' ability to these materials: if selections are relevant (i.e. students *want* to read them because they somehow relate to their lives), and presented in an accessible way, students can read things which, from a linguistic point of view, may seem beyond their "level." It is important not to choose only very simplified texts and reject others just because they 'look too hard'. Guidelines for making challenging texts accessible are presented on p. 153.

The most important point to remember in using these materials is that reading is not a pronounciation activity; it is a meaning-making activity. This means that the focus of instruction should not be accuracy in oral reading, but comprehension. If students' are corrected whenever they mispronounce a word or read something incorrectly, they will get the message that the purpose of reading is to sound good. Reading research (see Carrell, Devine and Eskey 1988) indicates that this kind of sound-centered model of reading inhibits comprehension; proficienct readers predict, guess, skip and often make miscues in the process of reading for meaning. Teachers should ignore miscues unless they interfere with the meaning of the text.

Further, research[1] shows that students' ability to use their prior knowledge is key in comprehension: they can make sense of what they read to the extent that it fits with what they know. Reading must be contextualized in discussion of the text content and structure so that students can establish expectations before reading and read interactively. This can be facilitated by **pre-reading** discussions and exercises linking text content to student experience, as well as encouraging students to predict, guess, and skip **during reading**, and again relating the text to their own lives **after reading**.

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[1]See Carrell and Eisterhold, Clarke, and Hudson in Carrell, Devine and Eskey (1988) for a discussion of schema theory and its instructional implications.

NON-TRADITIONAL PUBLISHED MATERIALS[2]

Literature: Excerpts from books, short stories and poems, especially those by or about immigrants are powerful ways to elicit student experience. We have used excerpts from Hong Kingston's, Woman Warrior (1978), poems of Langston Hughes, and bilingual poetry. Ann describes using an excerpt in "Images and Stereotypes" (Talking Shop).

Oral Histories, Autobiographies and Biographies: Accounts of real people's lives are engaging, especially when they are ordinary people with experiences like our students'. We have used excerpts from Don't Be Afraid Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks from the Heart (1987) (an oral history of a peasant woman who addresses a wide range of issues from domestic violence to education, childrearing, etc.), and The Mango Tree (a collection of short oral histories by school children interviewing relatives). Ann describes using autobiographies in "Real People's Stories" (Talking Shop).

Student-produced publications: There is an increasing number of published collections of student writings. Some that we have used are from East End Press (a Toronto-based student publishing house), Need I Say More (Boston's journal of adult student writings including some of our students' work) and Voices (a Canadian magazine).

Children's Literature: In the context of a family literacy class, children's books (which might otherwise seem inappropriate for adults) make sense: they can be read and discussed in class to model shared reading with children. We have particularly used multi-cultural and bilingual books such as the beautiful books from Children's Book Press.

Newspapers: Newspaper articles can be used to develop themes which have already been identified or to introduce important local issues. We have used articles about a Hispanic parents' organization, the new immigration law, the English Only movement, etc., making these articles accessible by taking excerpts, dividing the article into sections which different groups of students read and report on, or re-writing them.

School flyers: Report cards, letters home, parent newspapers and other materials from students' children's schools can become texts. We have tried to contextualize reading these materials in critical literacy activities where students not only try to understand them, but determine their own responses. Loren discusses how she did this in "Homework Codes" (Talking Shop).

Printed community and workplace materials: Printed handouts, advertisements, signs, bus schedules, employer or union flyers, and other literacy materials that are part of students' everyday environment can become texts. Students can be encouraged to bring things to class which they need help reading (like the traffic ticket that Madeline's student brought because he didn't know how to pay it). Again, it is important to address these materials in a critical context going beyond literal comprehension with questions like "Why is this written in language that is so difficult to understand, even for Americans?" Examples of this kind of critical analysis are presented in "Traffic Tickets" and "Images and Stereotypes" (Talking Shop).

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[2]Specific references and ordering information are listed in Resources at the end of this Guide. We have reviewed a number of such texts that we have used in our classes in the TESOL Quarterly, Vol. 23 (2), June 1989 (321-335).

GUIDELINES FOR USING PUBLISHED TEXTS

Choose interesting, relevant texts[3]

*Choose passages which clearly relate to students' experiences or concerns (where the topic is familiar, easily recognizable and problematized). Texts written by, or about immigrants and/or inviting cross-cultural comparison work especially well.

*Choose relatively short and pithy excerpts.

*Give students choice: invite them to select from a range or bring in their own texts.

Use graphic support in presenting texts

*Enlarge excerpts and present them with a lot of blank space on the page.

*Include pictures with them as the basis for pre-reading discussion and non-verbal sources of information.

***Before reading:* Always present pre-reading activities**

*Elicit prior knowledge: Ask students about their own experience relating to a topic; present a picture to generate discussion.

*Present key concepts/words through clustering exercises: present a key word and elicit associations with the word ("What does this word/picture make you think of?"); draw a semantic map or web on the board, linking students' associations to the word in graphic form (see p. 167 for an example)

*Preview the text and elicit predictions: Look at pictures, the title, the first sentence and ask students to guess what the passage will be about.

*Develop pre-reading questions with students: Ask students to make their own questions about the passage based on the preview (what they want to find in reading).

***During reading:* Focus on meaning**

*Provide a number of "channels" of access: Don't stick to the model of a single student reading aloud to a group while others listen and the teacher corrects; the teacher can read to students while they read silently, the students can read chorally, the students can read silently before reading aloud, students can read in pairs, students can read silently.

*Break up the reading of a passage: present short pieces of it at a time (making predictions and discussing meaning as you go) or have groups of students read different sections and share them with others.

***After reading:* Link texts to students' experience**

*Focus on questions that ask for interpretation rather than only literal comprehension.

*Ask students to evaluate what they read in light of their own experience ("Does this seem real? Has anything like this ever happened to you? What would you do if...?")

*Have students do READ/REACT exercises: On the left side of the page, they copy a passage they liked, disliked, had strong feelings about or that reminded them of something in their own experience; on the right side of the page, they write their reactions.

*Ask students to generate questions for the author of the story or each other.

*Ask students to tell/write their own sentences/poems/stories related to the story they read.

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[3] We have compiled a thematically organized student reader, Looking Forward, Looking Back of this kind of text suitable for ESL literacy students (available for $3; see Resources for ordering information).

Examples: In the following example (fully described in Talking Shop, p.42), reading leads to a collaborative student-generated text:

Madeline used a story from a Canadian ABE students' journal A Writer's Voice in which a mother talks about her daughter's school experience. Before the reading she made a chart of all her students' children, their ages, schools, etc. She wrote questions on cards for students to discuss after the reading: blue cards had questions about the story itself; white cards had questions relating the story to the students' own experiences. She gave a homework assignment with new vocabulary, questions about the story, etc. The next day students talked about their responses. Madeline transcribed the discussion and typed up what students had said; they used this as the text for the next class.

The following example shows how a reading can be used as the first in a series of tools to develop a theme: in this case the sequence moved from reading to grammar to discussion to writing, back to grammar and then to interviewing. Content moved from a common issue here in the U.S. to looking backward (personal journeys) to generalizing and looking at the social context in the U.S. again.

Ann adapted a story from The House on Mango Street (Cisneros 1984) for her intermediate class. After brief discussion of arriving in the U.S., students read the story and did some question formation exercises based on the story. A common issue - English-related problems - arose in response to the question, "How do you feel speaking English?" Ann then brought in immigration pictures (people on journeys) from magazines; students chose pictures and talked about them in small groups. Students were then supposed to stand in front of class and answer questions about their pictures, but instead talked about their own pictures. This sparked discussion of students' own journeys. Then they wrote stories of their own journeys in class. For homework, students were asked to interview someone else about their journey: why they came and what happened when they got here; they were supposed to write their own questions and then write the response on a structured form:

Write your question:_____
Write the answer:_____

Suggestions for follow-up (from Teacher Sharing) included pooling responses into chart form (Reasons for Coming and What happened once you got here) so students could see their own experiences in a broader context.

Fables, Folktales and Proverbs

Fable, folktale, and proverb genres are particularly effective in meeting the goal of using published materials to draw out students' own experience: although the specific content varies from culture to culture, the forms are familiar to most cultural groups and many of the themes are universal. As such, they provide a powerful framework for cultural exchange.

Fable/folktale activities are particularly suited to Family Literacy classes as a way into parent-child interactions: sharing these stories can serve as a model for the kind of sharing that parents might do with their children. Stories written by parents can become a vehicle for preserving and transmitting the home culture. For example, in one class, Ann's students read a bilingual Punjabi/English fable; then she gave them a blank lined page with the heading "A Fable from_____." Students responded in a variety of ways: one wrote a fable from her country and read it in class with her child; another copied something from a children's book; another wote a song from her country; one wrote about the history of her own country; and still another wrote about a persona experience in her country. In another class, she presented the fable and worksheet on the following page and students wrote their own wish stories.

There are currently a number of ESL texts with fables and folktales from different countries (eg. Kasser and Silverman 1986); we have adapted these in a number of ways:

1. Before reading, talk about what a fable is (a story with a moral or lesson, often using animals to represent people). Model and elicit oral examples.

2. Do a literacy activity (eg. present scrambled sentences of the story on cards scrambled (like a strip story); ask groups of students to put them together).

3. Present the text as a whole, in the way it appears in a book or in simplified and enlarged form. Students can read it silently, chorally or listen to the teacher read it.

4. Students can work in small groups with questions about the story, or they can generate their own questions for each other.

5. Follow-up can take a number of forms:
   - Students can tell and then write stories from their own cultures that the text reminds them of.
   -Groups of students from the same culture can work together to produce a story collaboratively and then share it with the class.
   -Students can share language games, songs or stories they tell young children in their home cultures.
   -Students can make books to share at home based on these stories.
   -Students can respond in whatever way they choose.

A Wise Wish

Once there was a very bad king who was unpopular with all his people.

One hot day when he was walking by the river, the king decided to go for a swim. He was a good swimmer, but when he was swimming, he got a cramp. He started to drown.

Two farmers were working in a field nearby when they heard the king yelling. The farmers jumped in the river and rescued the king. The king thanked the farmers and identified himself. He was so grateful that he gave each farmer a wish.

The first farmer asked for a pair of water buffalo. The king agreed. He promised to give the farmer the animals.

The second farmer was old and wise. He thought for a long time. Then he said: "This is my wish: Don't tell anyone that I helped to save your life."

from Kasser and Silverman, 1989

name _____

date _____

Please write a fable from your country:

TEACHER-PRODUCED MATERIALS

Teachers can create class-specific materials based on themes they have identified by listening to students. In this case, the teacher writes a short text which raises an issue without presenting a solution. Texts can take the form of short stories, dialogues, 'Dear Abby' letters, or news articles, followed by discussion questions, grammar work and/or writing exercises. As the following examples show, they can be used as a way to generate discussion of alternative solutions, situate a local problem in a broader context, or elicit new issues.

September 21, 1987

Dear Frances,

How are you doing? I'm writing now to ask your advice. You know I was working in the Comfort Pillow Factory in Somerville. I had some problems one day while I was working. The boss said I was talking too much when I was at work. It isn't true, but anyway he fired me last week. Now I need to find another job.

Yesterday when I was walking downtown I saw a "HELP WANTED" sign in a restaurant. I thought it looked good. But last night I was talking to some friends and my friend Alicia said that I can't get another job because of the new immigration law. My friend Allen said I should go to the Immigration Office and get amnesty. I am scared and confused. Do you have any suggestions? Is it easy to find work in New York City? Please write soon!

Your friend in Boston,

Jean-Paul

Example: This teacher-written article was accompanied by vocabulary work and the following questions.

ANN LANDERS

Dear Ann Landers:

I'm in a bind. I hope you can help me out. I'm a mother with two kids in the Boston Public Schools. My oldest child is 15 years old. She is taking a Health class. In the Health class they are teaching the kids about AIDS. I am very angry. I think my daughter is too young to learn about this. Another problem is that I don't speak much English so I can't talk to the teachers. Please help!! What should I do?

signed

a very angry mother

What?

AIDS is Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.
It is a sickness without a cure.

Who?

Anyone can get AIDS - old, young, male, female, hetrosexual, homosexual.

How?

A person can get AIDS through sexual contact and from contaminated intravenous needles.
AIDS is spread when BLOOD or SEMEN are shared.
A person cannot get AIDS through casual contact (kissing, shaking hands, toilet seats).
Pregnant mothers can give their babies AIDS.

What can we do to prevent AIDS?

We can educate ourselves and our family and friends.
We can use condoms and birth control gel with nonoxynol 9 when we have sexual contact.

You make friends with someone from another country who recently moved to Boston. Your new friend does not speak much English. He asks you about AIDS. "What is AIDS?" How can people get AIDS? How can I avoid getting AIDS?"
Can you answer his questions?

Do you know anyone who has AIDS? How do you think you would feel if someone you know got AIDS? What would you do?

Some people think "People who get AIDS are bad."
Why do you think they say this? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Codes

According to Wallerstein (1983),[4] "Codes...are concrete physical expresssions that combine all the elements of [a] theme into one representation..." The most important difference between a code and other teacher-created materials is that the issue is presented in very concrete, simplified form and accompanied by a relatively structured series of dialogue questions leading to social analysis and action. A code may be verbal (a short dialogue or text) and/or non-verbal (a drawing or photo). The mark of a good code is that it generates heated discussion. As such, a code is much more than a visual aid: it is a framework for critical thinking.

Example: The following is an example of a teacher-made code with questions simple enough to use with beginning students.[5] It shows that you don't have to be an artist to draw codes. Barndt even suggests that teachers draw codes with their left hand if they're right-handed (or vice versa) to demonstrate that it's not the artistic quality of the picture that counts, but the clarity of the content: this may make students less inhibited about drawing their own codes as well. Examples of codes developed from issues identified in our classes are presented on pp. 167-8.

Neighborhood harrassment

This activity was developed in response to the large number of harrassment incidents in many refugee neighborhoods. The ESL students are told that the woman looking out the window in the picture below has a hospital appointment she doesn't want to miss, in a little over an hour's time. Use the following progression of questions to guide a classroom discussion:

I. Describe content:
- What do you see?
- Who is the woman?
- What is she doing?
- What is she thinking?
- Where is she?
- Who are the men?
- What are they doing?
- What are they thinking?
- Where are they?

II. Define problem:
- How does the woman feel?
- Is she happy, sad, worried, afraid? Why?
- Why is she alone?
- How do the men feel? Why?
- Do they like to stand in the street?
- What does the woman think the men feel?
- What do the men think the woman feels?

III. Personalize problem:
- Has this ever happened to you?
- How did you feel?
- Did you leave the house?
- Did you talk to the men?
- Did they talk to you?

IV. Discuss problem within a socio-economic cultural context:
- In your country/culture, are people alone much?
- Are they afraid?
- Do women walk in the streets alone?

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[4] Wallerstein's book, Language and Culture in Conflict: A Problem-Posing Approach to ESL (Addision-Wesley 1983) describes in detail how to create and use codes.

[5] From Paul, M., Ed. (1986). Another excellent source of codes with simple questions is In Print (Long and Spiegel-Podnecky, Addison-Wesley 1988).

Guidelines for Creating Codes

A code should be:

*FAMILIAR: represent a clearly recognizable daily concern

*EMOTIONALLY CHARGED/LOADED: represent an issue that evokes emotion, invites involvement

*TWO-SIDED/PROBLEMATIZED: represent a problem or contradiction, presented in a way that is complex enough to show its various contradictory aspects but simple enough for students to project their own experience onto it

*OPEN-ENDED: without any implied solutions or obvious 'right/wrong' interpretations

Guidelines for dialogue questions

Wallerstein (1983) suggests the following five-step questioning process to guide discussion of the code:

1. **Describe** what's happening and how you feel about it: What do you see? Who do you see? What are they doing? How do they feel? This is the literal comprehension phase.
2. **Define** the problem concretely: What's the problem here? Students name the problem and talk about its different aspects. There may be several perceptions of the problem which get redefined as discussion develops.
3. **Relate** it to individual experiences: Has anything like this ever happened to you? Do you ever feel like X? How do you feel about it? What happens in your country/neighborhood/workplace? Sometimes it helps to ask students to relate their own experiences indirectly, using questions like, Do you know anyone in a similar situation? This gives students the option of masking their own experience. Sharing experiences helps students feel less alone.
4. **Analyze** root causes: Where did this problem come from? Why does it exist? Who created this situation? As students look for causes, they situate the issue in a broader social/historical context.
5. **Plan for action**: What can the person in the code do? What can you do? Students develop their own alternatives for addressing the problem, figure out ways to take action and discuss consequences of different strategies.

Code[6]

Lucia: Vamonos, pues.

Maria: I don't want to go with you.

Lucia: ¿Porqué no?

Maria: Because you always talk in Spanish. It sounds stupid. When you speak Spanish, everyone knows we come from Puerto Rico. Why don't you talk to me in English?

Lucia: Tu familia habla español. Debe sentirese orgullosa de tus raizes.

Maria: English is better.. All my friends speak English. Anyway, I don't understand Spanish.

1. Who do you think Lucia is? Who do you think Maria is?
   What language is Lucia speaking?
   What language is Maria speaking?

2. What language does Maria want her mother to speak? Why?
   What does Maria think about Spanish?
   Does Maria want people to know that her family is from Puerto Rico? Why not?
   Does Maria understand Spanish? Why does she say she doesn't?

3. How would you feel if Maria were your daughter?
   Do your children ever feel like Maria?
   Do you want your children to learn your language?

4. Why do children resist their parents' languages?
   How do schools view your language?
   Where do children get their attitudes toward languages?

5. What would you do if you were Lucia?
   What can you do about this problem with your own children?

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[6]This code dealing with the issue of children's negative feelings about the home language resulted from an overheard conversation between a parent and child. This code can be used with students who don't speak Spanish by asking them to guess what Lucia is saying.

Code[7]

My husband speaks to me in English. And I understand everything he says to me but I don't speak to him in English because I don't want him to see my mistakes because I am embarrassed in front of him. He speaks to me in English and I speak to him in Spanish. Only I speak in English to my daughter and the people in the street or when I go to the hospital or my daughter's school because her teacher speaks English.

1. Is the writer a man or woman?
   What language does she use to speak to her husband?
   What language does she use to speak to her daughter?
   What other people does she speak English with? Why?
   Why does she speak English when she goes to her daughter's school?

2. Why does her husband speak English to her?
   Why does she speak Spanish to him?
   Why is she embarrassed?
   Why does she speak English to her daughter?

3. Have you ever felt embarrassed about speaking English?
   Describe what happened.
   How do you think her daughter feels? Do you have children?
   How do you feel speaking English with them?
   How do you think her husband feels? Have you ever felt like him?

4. When are you most comfortable speaking English? Why?
   When are you least comfortable speaking English? Why?
   What is your native language? When do you speak it and with whom?

5. What can you do to feel more comfortable about speaking English?

Exercise: Now develop your own dialogue questions to go with the photo on p.146; then identify an issue from your students' lives, draw a simple picture to represent it and develop dialogue questions.

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[7] Loren developed this code when she came upon a student's journal entry which raised the issue of family language dynamics - a theme which she thought would be relevant for the whole class. She asked the student's permission to share her entry with the class and then copied it with corrected spelling as a code, using the accompanying questions to guide discussion. As follow-up, students wrote their own accounts of family language dynamics. A full account of how this cycle developed is presented in Auerbach and McGrail 1990).

Using Codes: Codes can be presented in a number of ways: asking students to take parts and act them out, scrambling lines or cutting them apart and asking students to put them together; as cloze exercises, etc. Breaking them down and presenting them as language lessons may make them more accessible and satisfy students' desire to focus on language work.

The questions/guidelines for discussion should be seen as just that - guidelines and not prescriptions. Their purpose is not to give students language practice but rather to provide teachers with a conceptual framework to guide discussion so that critical thinking develops; *this means the questions don't even have to be presented to students in writing.* Without conscious guidance, it is very easy for the discussion to get stuck at the level of relating codes to students' personal experience. What differentiates a problem-posing approach from others is that it goes beyond personal stories to examine individual experience in light of collective experience and even further toward making changes in light of the analysis. Thus, teachers should use the questions to keep on this general track, but also should feel free to rephrase them or change the content maintaining the general direction from description to experience to social analysis and strategies for change.

As with any tool, what actually happens when you present a code may be quite different from what you planned. A code may fail to spark any interest or it may raise completely new issues. Further, the stages of the 'dialogue' process may not all happen at once or in discussion format: it may take weeks to go through the process of moving from the introduction of an issue to the action stage with a range of activities along the way. It is important to include concrete language work at various stages (especially in focusing on action), asking not just "What can you do?" but also, "What can you say?" The exercise on the facing page, for example, could be used early in the process to elicit students' own problems, in the middle to link a code to particular situations, or toward the end to develop the language for action.

Finally, it is important to remember that in a participatory approach, a goal is for students to increasingly participate in creating their own tools: photos, texts, skits, etc. Teachers' codes, thus serve as a model for what students themselves may produce. Guidelines for developing codes with students are presented in ESL for Action (Auerbach and Wallerstein 1987:59).

Problems!

1. You need a break.
   What can you say?

_____.

2. It's too hot.
   What can you say?

_____.

3. Your pay is wrong.
   What can you say?

_____.

4. You don't understand someone.
   What can you say?

_____.

FOLLOW-UP:

Write about a problem you or a friend had while you were working.
Don't forget - try to use the past progressive + past tenses!!
(example: I was working when I hurt my foot)

COLLABORATIVE TEACHER-STUDENT MATERIALS

One of the most powerful tools for following up on the discussion generated by catalysts, published texts or codes is creating texts from students' own words and ideas. Seeing their own words written, xeroxed and presented as reading material gives students a real sense of the importance of their ideas. In addition, it legitimizes talk which students might otherwise feel doesn't count as real language learning. For many students, it is the first time that they have had the experience of seeing their own words in writing. Since the words and ideas come from them, the text is already familiar, facilitating the link between sound, symbol and meaning. Madeline's lowest level classes were able to read much longer and more complicated texts than ever before when they were based on class discussions. Further, the conceptual level of this kind of text is often much more sophisticated than anything students encounter in published literacy materials for beginners.

In addition, as students see what they have said in writing, they make connections between spoken and written language. As teachers model the process, collaborative writing becomes a step toward independent student (as in the case of "Traffic Tickets"). The process also changes classroom roles as the teacher shifts from being the generator of meaning to being a scribe, classroom roles change. Madeline often withdrew into note-taking during heated student discussions as a way to remove the focus from herself; taking herself out of the role of discussion leader allowed the classroom dynamic to become much more student-directed. Finally, when students' own words are re-presented to them, they can step back and reflect on what they have said, leading to further analysis.

Collaborative writing can be used in a variety of contexts, with different degrees of student participation. The teacher can non-intrusively take notes during a spontaneous discussion or write it up from memory after the class is over as a text for further reading/discussion; in this case, the ideas come from the students but the actual words are chosen by the teacher. Alternatively, non-intrusive transcribing can be done in front of students, so that they see key words/ideas as they emerge; again, the generation of ideas is not disrupted by involving students in the actual writing (focus on form) but the literacy link is immediate, with the record of the discussion available for follow-up later. Finally, the teacher can explicitly invite students to dictate a story or discussion, using a Language Experience Approach (see p.166). In any case, the key to using this tool is that it be organically linked to the development of a theme rather than being an isolated activity or an end in itself.

Guidelines for the Language Experience Approach (LEA)

Getting started: elicit ideas and establish a purpose

Since LEA is designed to reinforce the connection between print and meaning, *content is key:* students have to have something to say! If it's clear that students already have a lot to say - they're engaged in a heated discussion - the teacher can ask if they want to write their ideas, giving them a choice and establishing a purpose for the activity (with questions like 'Would you like to write a group letter about this? Who should it be addressed to?'). Alternatively, the teacher can initiate the LEA process by introducing brainstorming or clustering exercises around a theme/ picture: students call out as quickly as possible any words that come to mind about a phrase, picture or key word. Once a few of these words have been generated, each of them in turn becomes a catalyst for new words or phrases; as students generate clusters of words around these key words, the teacher writes them up in a web of relationships from which a story emerges. Since the point of this stage in the process is to generate ideas, it is extremely important to be flexible about language choice. The content of the story and what students attempt to say in English will be more complex and meaningful if they have the chance to develop their thoughts in the first language.

Writing the story: Focus on content, not form

The main concern in writing should be expressing ideas. Elicit content with questions like, 'What's important in this story? How do you want it to start? What do you want me to write? How do you want to say that? What comes next?' Try to avoid putting words into students' mouths. If students see exactly what they say in writing, they will make connections between oral and written language. If they are corrected, the flow of ideas will be inhibited, the conceptual level of the content will be diminished, and the link between spoken language and print will be undermined.

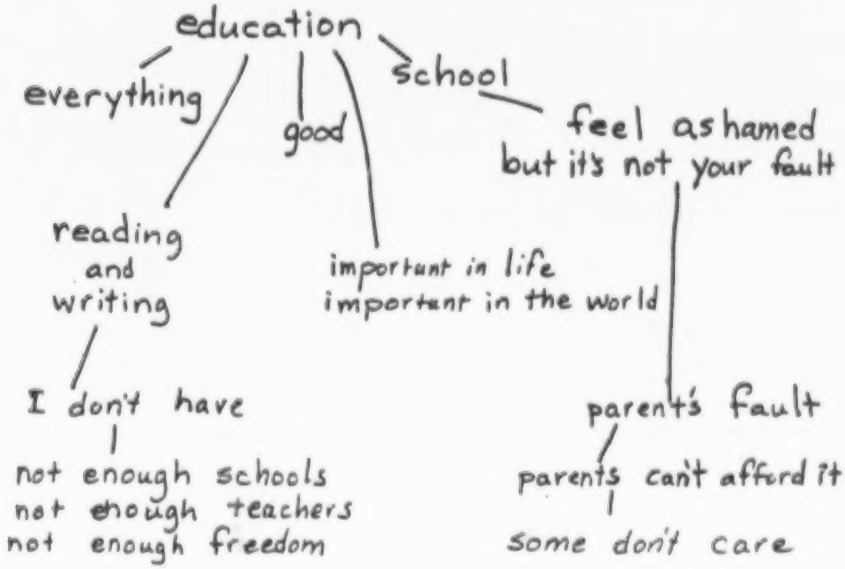
Reading the story: move from supported to independent reading

The teacher can read the text aloud as she writes it, read whole sentences and paragraphs when they're done, and invite students to read along. When the story is completed, the teacher can begin by reading it back to students as they read silently, asking them if they want to change anything and pointing to each word as it is read. Then the class can read the story chorally. Then students can read sentences individually or in pairs. Finally, students can be invited to read the story individually.

Follow up activities: extend language and ideas

What you do with a story once it's written depends on the purpose. If the story is to be shared with an audience outside of class, students often want to revise and edit it for content and mechanics. In "Parking Tickets," Madeline did this by cutting sentences into strips, grouping and reorganizing them. If the story is for internal class use only, revising may be counterproductive. The biggest danger in follow-up work is reducing a meaningful use of literacy to mechanical skills work. If key words are taken out of the story for phonics or vocabulary work, they should be put back into meaningful sentences where new ideas are generated; if grammar exercises are developed using language from the story, students should have the opportunity to construct meaningful new sentences related to the theme using those grammar points. Questions should go beyond literal comprehension to extend thinking around the theme (with questions like those used with codes) so that the story generates further reflection,dialogue or action rather than being an end in itself.

A clustering exercise.....



L. E. A. with school pictures

(1)

This is a picture of a school. The picture has a blackboard. It has a teacher. It has students. Students looking at the blackboard. She's writing math. The teacher is looking at the student writing on the blackboard. The teacher looking at the blackboard, "No good, writing." He is angry. No nice teacher. Student is afraid for teacher. School no good. Teacher is not happy because students don't understand. Teacher says, "Write more, write again." Teacher no good because he is angry and mean. Student standing up no understand.

...and an LEA story generated in response to a picture

An LEA cycle: While Madeline was working a food and nutrition theme in class, she did a clustering exercise about the word apple. Someone mentioned that there was a story on the news about apples being unhealthy and was concerned about this since their children eat a lot of apples. Madeline rewrote a newspaper article about alar. This, in turn, generated a discussion about causes of the problem and strategies for addressing it; Madeline took notes on the discussion and used it as a further text. In this example, the sequence moved from an LEA activity, to a teacher-written text to a collaborative text. The article and collaborative text are presented here.

People should just stop buying appl

MANY APPLES STILL TAINTED WITH ALAR

Many apples grown in the US might be tainted with Alar.

Maybe 33% of all apples grown in the US might be tainted with Alar.

Alar might cause cancer.

A TV show called 60 Minutes tested 200 apples from supermarkets from all over the US.

The reporter from 60 Minutes found Alar in many apples.

The reporter found Alar in:

- -38% of red apples
- -32% of all apples
- -30% of apples called Alar-free.

Many farmers said that they don't use alar anymore, but the reporter found that many farmers still use alar.

Alar helps apples to stay fresh for a long time.

Alar also helps apples look nice.

Alar might increase your chance of getting cancer

eat apples, they won't die
ill stop using ~~apples~~ alar.

that hurt themselves.

se if they eat things that
gerous. They take drugs etc

newspapers are making the
never heard about someone
eating apples.

companies should stop making Alar
ories should stop making Alar.

The government should stop the alar.

It's the customers (peoples) fault. They should stop buying the apples. If they stop, the farmers will stop using alar.

Boycott The farmers might lose money. Natural foods are more difficult to grow

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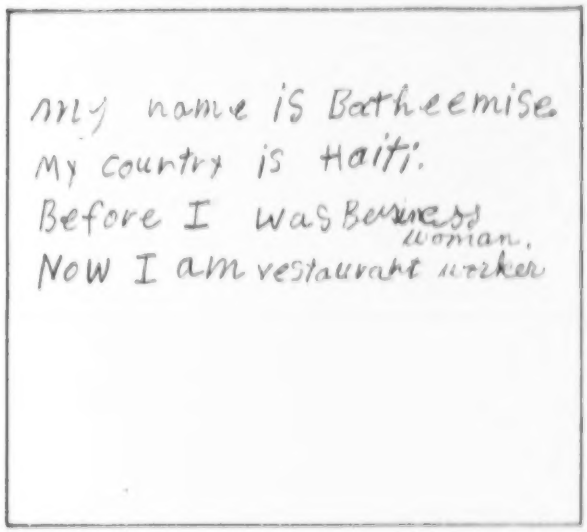
STUDENT WRITING

For adult literacy students, writing is often the most neglected skill area: they are given few opportunities for anything but the most rudimentary, functional kinds of writing - filling in blanks, forms, and writing sentences for the purpose of grammar practice. The focus of these tasks is arriving at the correct form of some pre-determined content. The rationale is that these are the only kinds of writing tasks students really need and are capable of until their oral competence develops. Writing, like reading, is often construed as a bottom-up process where each subskill (letter formation, spelling, etc.) must be mastered before proceeding to the next level.

Our experience has been that often students enjoy the challenge of writing from the earliest stages of literacy development and are able to express meaning very powerfully even with limited vocabulary and literacy proficiency. When the focus is on content rather than form, mechanical difficulties with letter formation, spelling, and grammar seem less like insurmountable obstacles. An important part of making this shift is talking about writing as a meaning-making process with students to overcome the deeply instilled concern with correctness.[8]

Examples:

Here, a beginning level student expresses a powerful contradiction in her life despite language limitations.



I think Bilingual Program Shouldn't end because Christopher Columbus Spoke Italian but Carried the Spanish flag Spanish language has honor If you let student gain a better education they have a better life. if you stop Bill-S-238 Then they can't harm our Children Education bilingual is good for every body in future

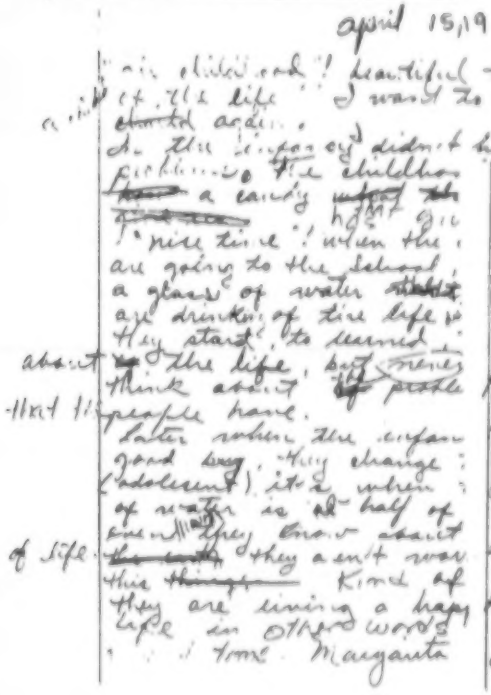
Carmen Medina

Here a student articulates her ideas for a public forum on bilingual education.

[8]See Martin (1989) for an extensive discussion of writing with adult literacy students.

Thus, even in beginning classes, it is important to provide opportunities for students to write for *real purposes and audiences.* They may start with picture labelling or sentences where the content comes from their lives (and the structure from the teacher). They may do personal writing (journals), interpersonal writing (letters), intergroup writing (exchanges of texts), or public writing (stories, poems, articles, letters for publication). In any case, the emphasis is on communicating ideas and creating semantically whole texts.

In addition to stressing writing for real purposes, a participatory approach emphasizes writing as a *social* rather than an *individual* process; students draw on each others' resources in generating and developing ideas, expressing them in a new language, working on organization and mechanics, and sharing the products of their labor. They work together to figure out what they want to say and how to say it, help each other when they're stuck, use each other as audiences and readers, and celebrate producing a final product. These ideas come from the writing process approach which has become so popular for elementary, secondary and college levels, but which is less often applied to adult ESL. They go beyond the writing process approach to the extent that they incorporate critical social analysis and action for change. Talking Shop includes several accounts of moving through the stages of the writing process (eg. "A Good Story" and "Learning Pictures"). The excerpts below reflect different stages in the drafting of a piece that was eventually published in Need I Say More:



april 15,1988.

" ain childhood "! beautiful time
of the life " I want to be
a child again.
In the childhood didn't have
problems the childhood
a candy
! " nice time "! when the
are going to the school
a glass of water
are drinks of the life
they start to learned
about the life, but
think about
people have.
later when the children
grow ung they change
(adolescent) it's when
of water is half of
they know about
of life they aren't wory
this things Kind of
they are living a happy
life in other words
time Margarita

Oh childhood! " Beautiful time of life! " I want to be a child again.

In childhood, childeen dont have problems, childhood is like a candy that gives us life, a "Sweet time". When the childeen begin school, this is like a glass of watee that is half full, half of life. They aee drinkong fkom this glass of life.

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Guidelines for Process Writing with Students

Getting started

*Contextualize writing, linking it to discussion and content students are already engaged with; writing should be one mode for expressing ideas, not an end in itself.

*Choose topics *with* students, not *for* them: Don't pre-determine topics; as a theme emerges, ask students if they want to write about it. The more control students have over what they write, the more they will become involved in the writing.

*Use concrete forms to generate ideas: Students can respond to visual or verbal catalysts (photos or reading excerpts) or create their own drawings/skits. Rachel Martin (1989) suggests asking students to call out titles to a picture (which the teacher writes on the board); then students write the story behind the title. She also suggests that students compare their own stories to the original when pictures have a text with them.

*Provide a model of the format: A visual model (a piece of writing in similar format or a page set up with lines), helps students structure their writing.

Developing ideas

*Use key words/phrases to develop ideas and vocabulary: Write emotionally loaded ideas on the board as discussion of a theme develops.

*Use visuals: Charts, clustering exercises, and maps can help students schematize ideas.

*Free-writing/free talking: Have students write or talk in pairs about anything that comes to mind on a theme for a few minutes; then elicit ideas from the group.

*Use interviewing: Have students generate questions, interviewing each other to elicit ideas.

*Allow language choice: Since the goal is to use writing to express meaning, students should be given maximum opportunity to develop a theme conceptually; for some, this may mean offering the option of using the first language.

Drafting

*Use class time for writing: Students become models for each other as they see each other write. They can ask each other for help and talk about their work as they write.

*Write with students: If you write while students are writing, they see that you are going through the same process; sharing your messy drafts and difficulties dispells notions that good writing involves writing perfectly the first time around.

Responding and revising

*Decide whether to revise: It's not always necessary to develop a piece of writing to a final product. In some cases, just getting an idea out may be enough. Decide whether to refine a piece on the basis of its purpose: if students want to develop an idea or share their work publically they will probably want to revise it.

*Make revising a social process: Ask students to read their drafts to each other ; just the process of reading her own work may give the writer ideas.

*Focus on content, and ideas: Rachel Martin suggests asking questions like "What's the most important thing you're saying? What just came into your head as you're reading? What do you want to do next?" - questions that leave control with the writer.

Editing

*Leave editing until the end: Don't work on mechanics until students have expressed their ideas the way they want them; otherwise the flow of ideas may be inhibited.

*Edit selectively: Decide on a few key points to work on so students aren't overwhelmed.

*Encourage self-editing: Ask students to find probem areas to develop monitoring skills.

Publishing

*Type, copy, collate, and/or distribute student writings on a theme when possible.

*Use student-written publications as texts for further reading, to share with other classes and for wider distribution when possible.

Journals

Student journals are an informal way to engage students in personal writing and to establish one-to-one communication with them; they provide students with a place to express ideas without worrying about form and teachers with a window on students' lives which can lead to the identification of issues.

1) Provide bound notebooks with lined pages for students to write in; we used bluebooks because they are cheap, small enough not to be overwhelming, but official-looking.

2) Explain to students that journals are for writing anything they want to write about and will be a place for the exchange of ideas, not for grammar work; that you are concerned with their thoughts, not with spelling, punctuation, etc.

3) Journals should be self-selected writing only, not a place for other kinds of writing assignments. To get the ball rolling, though, you can suggest that students write a few words or sentences about themselves, their lives or something that has happened recently.

4) Include time for journal writing in class on a regular basis (eg. fifteen minutes at the beginning or end of each class/once a week). Make the atmosphere relaxed: Loren played music during journal time.

5) Hand journals back to students as quickly as possible.

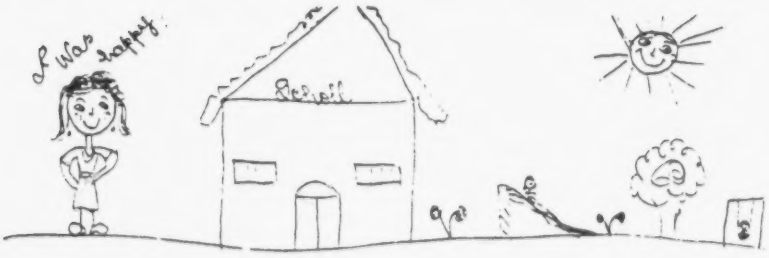
6) Respond to students' writing by sharing your own thoughts, experiences, and feelings. This kind of sharing (rather than only commenting on students' experiences) creates a sense of equality and exchange. Experiment with asking students' questions: sometimes it may be too controlling and sometimes it may help students continue writing.

7) Negotiate the issue of corrections: Students often want teachers to correct their journals. It's important to both explain why you're not correcting and accomodate their desire for corrections. Some possible ways of doing this are: modeling a correct form by giving back a sentence with the same structure but different content; ask students to underline words/forms they want corrected and give them the correction on a separate piece of paper (not correcting the students' writing itself); select recurring problems or problems that interfere with meaning by designing lessons to teach those structure (without making direct reference to the journals.

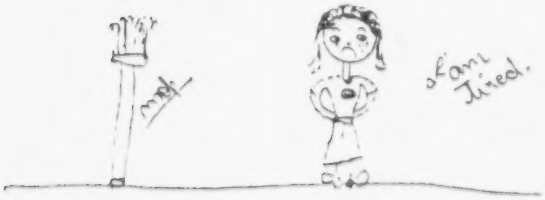
No examples from student journals are included here because they are confidential, personal exchanges not meant for public sharing.

Autobiographical Writing

Focused writing about specific themes in students' lives elicit rich stories. Our students have written about their mothers, about their journeys to the U.S., about their own school experiences, about their own teaching and learning as parents, about language use in the family and family dynamics, etc. Most of these writings have been in response to another task - reading someone else's story, drawing time lines, reacting to a picture, reading a poem or an excerpt from literature. "Writing About Our Mothers" and "Real People's Stories" in Talking Shop both describe teachers experiences doing this kind of autobiographical writing with students. In the first example below, students drew pictures and wrote sentences about their lives which the teacher typed and collated into a book; the second is from a unit called Mothers are Teachers in which students took pictures of their children and wrote about ways they teach them. It was later published in Need I Say More.



In my country I was a teacher for kids.
I was happy.



In the U.S. I am housekeeper and student.
I am tired.

ABOUT NATALY RUBIO

By Gloria Rubio

I wanted to say something about my wonderful little girl. Her name is Nataly, she is 2½ years old. She is a very nice girl, she is very sweet, she smiles a lot.

Two weeks ago I started to teach her how to use the toilet. The first day when I started to teach Nataly about toilet training, I told her, "Nataly, it is time to leave your Pampers because you aren't supposed to use Pampers anymore. You are a big girl now." So I explained to her, when babies are bigger they don't need to use Pampers anymore. She hasn't used Pampers since that first day.

She is a very nice girl. She tells me every 10 or 15 minutes, "Mamy, I want to make peepee," and she goes to the bathroom and uses it very well. That same day in the night I tried to put the Pampers on Nataly for the night, but she didn't want them. She told me, "Mamy, I don't want to use Pampers. I don't like Pampers." Before she went to sleep she went to the bathroom and she told me, "OK Mamy, I'm all ready to go to bed," and she slept without Pampers. She didn't have any more accidents in the bed. Sometimes when I stay outside of my house with her, she tells me when she needs to go to the bathroom.

From the first day of training to today Nataly is doing everything well and she likes using the toilet. I'm happy with her.

Literary Genre

Fiction, fables, folktales and poems are all forms which inspire students to write creatively. Often students use a model from another author's work to guide the format of their writing, but respond to it in terms of their own experience. Here the choice of using the first language unleashed a creative energy that may not have been possible if students had been limited to using their second language.

RECUERDO DE LO QUE FUI

Por Ruth Loran Amador

Arbol de tronco fuerte,
en el pasado deslumbroso,
Hojas en el suelo tienes,
señal de maños criminales.

Con el pasar del tiempo,
solo recuerdos dejas,
Hojas en el suelo tienes,
para en ellas caminar.

Alegría a tu alrededor,
sombras en tu interior;
raíces sembradas,
señal de vida.

Morirá tu físico
más tu recuerdo perdura;
através del tiempo,
crecerás mas bello.

EL ÁRBOL MUERTO

Por Angel Pagan

Solo queda el tronco de un gran árbol. Sus raíces penetradas en la tierra de donde fue derribado.

Seco y hueco ha quedado con el paso de los tiempos lo rodean secas hojas arrastradas por el viento.

El leñador lo ha cortado para sacarlo del medio. También de él tomó leña para cocer su alimento.

De él hizo fuego para calentar su cuerpo frente a la chimenea en el tiempo del invierno.

Ya todo ésto ha pasado y en un silencio sereno ha quedado abandonado el tronco de un árbol muerto.

Letter writing

Real letters, written to real people for real purposes are among the most familiar, communicative and authentic types of writing for adult students. Our students have written letters to teachers, teen-age mothers, newspaper editors, funders, and other students. The following letter was written to the Governor at the time of funding cuts.

5/10/88.-

Dear Governor Dukakis:

We are students at the Cardinal Cushing Center We are studing English. We need help! We need money for supplies, more rooms and more teachers. We feel bad because you are giving us very little money next year. We think the money is very important for continuing our Habla program. We need English for our Work, and for communicating to other people.

Please help us, Governor. Because you are an immigrant too, we know you understand our problem. We hope you will cooperate.

Sincerely the students from level I.

Guillermo Avilés
Rosa Hood
Carmen Melinda Virginia Pacheco Lorea McBride

CARDINAL'S STEWARDSHIP APPEAL

Letter exchanges

The process: Inspired by Heath and Branscombe (1984) and others, we decided to set up letter-writing exchanges between classes. Each teacher introduced the idea to her students in a group discussion, explaining it as a way to get to know other immigrants/refugees in similar situations. We then gave students the choice about participating. Some were enthusiastic and others reluctant because they felt they couldn't write well enough. Teachers pursued the idea with those classes that seemed most interested. Participating classes did class profile charts including information on each student's name, age, sex, home country and neighborhood in Boston. We decided not to elicit other kinds of information (about work, children, etc.) so that these topics could become part of the content of the exchange. Making these charts itself was a language development activity (eg. clarifying the difference between address and neighborhood). Classes were then paired on the basis of size (corresponding numbers of students) and the paired classes exchanged class profiles; students in one class used the available information to choose partners. Students then talked about, wrote and sent off their first letters (through their teacher, who delivered them to the partners' teacher).

Some problems: However, as soon as this inital process was completed, a number of logistical problems began to emerge. Answers didn't come back soon enough and senders got discouraged by lack of immediate feedback. The class pairings were uneven: higher level students were disappointed with their partners' letters; the matching within classes was somewhat random so students didn't always have common interests. The content of many of the letters seemed formulaic; students hadn't internalized the idea that the kind of letter you write shapes the response you get. The purposes for writing were not clear, either to us or to the students in terms of what students would get out of it and how it related to other things we were doing; some students seemed to be doing it because it was an assignment. Other things (eg. day to day problems) took priority for the class and for individuals: it was hard to fit letter-writing in.

Finally, class cycles weren't long enough to fully explore the possibilities of this kind of exchange; by the time partners had been chosen and one round of letters had been exchanged, the cycle was over and a new set of students were in class. Without the support of the classroom context, it was difficult for students who had moved to higher levels to sustain the writing.

A different kind of exchange: Following up on this effort, Loren started an exchange between her class (Hispanic mothers) and that of a friend who was teaching pregnant/parenting Hispanic teens in another part of the state. These purpose of the exchange was framed as giving advice and sharing concerns about parenting. Loren noted that the resulting letters were the longest pieces of writing her students had done - significantly more elaborated, detailed and authentic than others. In this case, there was a commonality of experience and a clear purpose for the exchange.

In another case, her class did an exchange of stories about parenting with an ABE class (mainly Afro-American mothers): each group wrote about the issues they were facing as parents, and read each others' stories. One student from Loren's class visited the other class and read her work aloud. Writings from the two classes were pulled together into a booklet about parenting, which, in turn became the focus of a workshop at a city-wide conference for literacy students. The workshop was an exciting one: in addition to the two classes meeting, a group of Indochinese women from another site came. Everyone was astounded by the fact that despite differences in background, culture and language, the issues they faced were so similar - their fears for their children about drugs, AIDS, schooling and so on. Clearly in these two cases, it was the content of the issues that pulled the groups together and gave the exchange its power.

Implications: These contrasting experiences suggest a number of points about writing exchanges:

*It's not enough to set up a letter exchange for its own sake; there needs to be some content-related motivating reason.

*In the initial pairing process, both level and interest need to be taken into account. Group interest/commonality are as important as individual interest.

*Class time must be devoted to exploring possible issues and topics, develop a sense of audience (with students perhaps pairing up to explore what's interesting to another person) and model the letter-writing process.

*Issues which draw students/classes away from personal letter exchanges can be incorporated into the content of letters once suitable partnerships have been established; students can write about the issues and concerns that are consuming their energy.

Class and Community Newsletters

As we said in Chapter 5, class newsletters serve several functions. They can summarize classroom activities, discussions and learning for students who have been absent; they can provide review; they can legitimize past discussions and catalyze new ones; they can be a vehicle for communicating with other classes in the same site; they can be a form of documentation of learning; they be a tool for developing a participatory atmosphere. Teachers can begin by writing articles themselves, then write collaboratively with students until eventually students take over the process, including the production itself. Andy presents an example of using a class newsletter in "Our Class" (Talking Shop).

Charo's class, located in a housing development, produced a community newsletter which reported on what was happening in class for non-students who were interested, community events and interviews with community members. The following is an excerpt from an interview in the newsletter about a community person who visits tenants when they are sick. The same issue included articles about Chinese New Year (since many tenants are Chinese and Hispanic tenants were curious about their celebrations), about a tenant who visits people in prison who have no family in this country, stories about several other residents as well as news of those who are sick (so others can look out for them).

VISITANDO ENFERMOS

Por Calixto Ortiz

Quería preguntarle a Antonio Diaz porque él iba a visitar los enfermos. Quería conocer su opinión sobre estas visitas y también si se enteraba de la asistencia que tenian los pacientes. Me interesaba conocer por qué él se sentía satisfecho cuando iba al hospital y encontraba mejor a los pacientes. También quería saber que hacia cuando el paciente no tenia buena atención médica.

Antonio Diaz dijo que se sentia satisfecho visitando enfermos de la siguiente manera: "Yo me siento feliz cuando comparto con otro, cambio de palabras, porque el señor dijo: "Llorar con los que lloran y cantar con los que cantan."

Testimonial Writing

Students can write to public officials, and use writing to prepare for presentations at public events. Our students often gave testimony at hearings about funding. One such speech is presented here.

Text of Speech by TGina Andrade at CDBG Hearing
Thursday, January 26, 1989
Jackson/Mann Community School

I'm a student in the Adult Education Program in English as a Second Language class. I'll begin by asking some questions only to keep fresh our memories.

--Do any American people here speak Chinese or Japanese?

--Do any Oriental people here speak Spanish?

--Or do any Spanish people speak Turkish?

--Or Turkish or Israeli people speak Portugese?

--Or Brazilian people speak our Indians' language -- Tupy Guarany?

If possible, we can think a little while: If you go to those places.... How will you feel? Maybe confused or completely lost or thrown off course.

We can't say like children, because children without words can communicate very well. For grown ups, no. It is impossible.

Well, this was my situation when I came to US. I didn't know about English.

In that time, the Jackson/Mann School didn't have space for me and my husband. We came here almost every day to look for classes.

Today, one year and two weeks later, I can hear a lot and write, read and make a speech, too. I think all students here have had some troubles like mine. And we know Jackson/Mann School's Adult Education Program is very, very important for all of us. Now Jackson/Mann is part of the history of our lives.

Thanks, directors.

Thanks, Ana Zambrano.

Thanks, Ann Cason.

Thanks, Christine James. Thanks a lot, Jackson/Mann and thank you.

STUDENT-PRODUCED PROJECTS

Perhaps the most participatory forms are those that students produce themselves, from beginning to end, combining various media and genre: in these, students decide not only on the theme or content, but actually carry out the production process right up to the final product. Projects may take the form of photo-stories, photo-novellas,[9] soap-operas, socio-dramas, songs, videotapes and slide shows. Ideally, students take on responsibility for both creative and technical aspects of the production process. In a photo-story, for example, they decide the story-line, take the pictures, write, revise and edit the text, select and sequence the photos, design and lay out the final product. This process is empowering because it puts control of the technology as well as the content in the hands of the learners; through it they learn technical and organizational skills.

The processes involved in this kind of project are complex, variable and time consuming; for each form (photo-novellas, photostories, video productions, participatory theater, etc.), there is a substantial literature documenting the rationale, proceedures and accounts of implementation. Since the best models for doing this type of work are the examples themselves, it makes more sense to refer you them (listed in Resources), rather than trying to present guidelines here. A good starting point is Barndt's Just Getting There (no date) which provides an overview of the range of possibilities including examples of using photo-novellas to reflect on classroom roles; using socio-dramas to enact and reflect on relationships and situations of women's daily lives (like being home-bound, raising adolescents, etc.); using song-writing and cartoons to address a workplace problem (machines breaking down); using photo-stories and drawings to frame analysis of roles in immigrant families; and using photo-stories to explore the issue of finding work. With our own students, the closest we came to this type of process was a photography project (called the FOCUS project) undertaken by one of Loren's classes and written up in a separate volume (Strohmeyer and McGrail, 1989). The following excerpts from On FOCUS give a sense of the power of this type of participatory project.[10]

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[9] A Latin American genre which might best be described as a soap-opera in comic book form using photos instead of drawings.

[10] Unfortunately, On Focus (Strohmeyer, B. and L. McGrail 1989) is currently out of print; contact us for information about future availability.

FOCUS: a photography and writing project

The first time we met as a group, we spent a good amount of time discussing the project and its possible outcomes. All the participants expressed why they were there and what they expected. This type of discussion took place many times throughout the duration of the project. We then plunged right into an exploration of images and how we react to them, utilizing some Polaroid slides of familiar scenes to the students: objects, people, and corners in and around El Centro where the program is located. This activity served the dual purpose of introducing students to the different elements of photography, i.e., light, focus, composition, etc. and providing them with the sense that, as photographers, they are empowered to choose how they want to present their subject. What followed is what set the stage for the rest of the project. There is something to photography in terms of its abstractness that allows people to conjure up an opinion, especially when there are no words attached to the image. Regardless of their level or language ability, not a single student in the class proceeded to just describe factual information of what was in the picture, but instead, wrote what the image evoked in them....

Several exciting things happened in the second cycle. Angel, a student who had participated in the project the previous cycle, joined us. He was instrumental in guiding the other project participants through several activities. For instance, he trained the new participants on the use of the Polaroids, and also, on different occasions, he talked to the students about his experiences the previous cycle, setting the stage for photo and writing activities. Something else that happened this cycle is that students were interested in developing photos and writings around a theme. Out of this cycle, emerged the "units" on **Mothers are Teachers** and **Neighborhood**, marking a difference from the "free form" works of the first cycle...

Letting go and releasing our imagination and creativity was the most fun. For some of us, FOCUS was refuge from bureaucratic hurdles..., from personal problems, from stolen welfare checks, from custody battles, from our war-ridden countries, and from our set daily routines and habits. Instead, we allowed ourselves to look at all these realities from another perspective by stepping back and looking through a different lens...

Oral Histories[11]

We're going to end this chapter with oral histories because, like photos, they can be used in many ways for many purposes at different points in the curriculum development process, and as such, serve as a kind of recapitulation of the range of possible tools. Narrowly defined, oral history is a research methodology which involves listening to and documenting stories told by ordinary people about objects, people, places and events in their lives. Historians collect these stories as the basis for historical analysis; anthropologists see them as a window on culture; folklorists collect them as unwritten literature. What's different about their use in ESL classes is that the process of collecting stories becomes a tool that benefits the storytellers themselves.

Why use Oral Histories in the ESL Classroom?

Our students are the bearers of incredible stories. Inviting them to share these stories with each other can be powerful for many reasons. Immigrants come to ESL in the process of leaving old ways behind; they may feel ambivalent about where they've come from, especially in a new culture which all too often sends the message that in order to 'become American,' they need to forget their pasts and 'be like us'. The process of sharing stories becomes a validation of the past, a way of reconciling the old and the new: by telling their stories in English class, their own cultures become a bridge to the new language.

In terms of classroom dynamics, the process of telling these stories itself builds trust among students. It helps students communicate across barriers of race, culture and gender and takes the focus off the teacher as they work together. In terms of language learning, sharing stories creates an atmosphere of genuine communication where language is used for a very real exchange of information and feeling. Since it doesn't require a final, written product, it can be used to develop listening and speaking (as well as reading and writing) and can draw on different learning styles (visual and oral) as well as different language levels. Most importantly, it involves students in communicating about and creating something that matters to them, that has meaning in their lives.

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[11] We were fortunate to participate in several workshops by Cincy Cohen and Beth Ensin of the Cambridge Oral History Center; most of what is written here is based on these workshops. The Oral History Center's address is listed under Resources.

The Process: Doing Oral History Interviews

As Beth Ensin of the Oral History Center said, the greatest gift you can give someone is to listen to their story. Listening is the central component of the oral history process. But listening is by no means a passive activity as we usually think of it: the way you listen in an interview can either silence the storyteller or draw out a story. The kind of active listening required for doing oral history interviews is a skill that must be learned through practice and reflection. What follows is a description not just of *how to listen* in an interview but of *learning how to listen* based on our own workshops with the Oral History Center:

1. Selecting a topic: An interview must have a focus (more than 'tell me your story'); very often it helps to center the interview around something concrete (an object, picture, timeline, map, or smell). Our own interviews focused on objects and important people in our lives. Topics can also come from classroom interaction: in Loren's class, the question 'Have you ever had the experience of God listening to you?' came up in discussion; she thought this would have made a wonderful topic for interviews.

Other topics might include: a favorite food, ways of cultivating, weather, childhood mischief, animals, smells (bring bags with distinct smelling things like coffee and ask what memories or stories they evoke), a time when you went through a change, a journey, gifts, school experience, stories your mother told you/stories you want your children to remember from your homeland.

2. Brainstorming possible interview questions: Once a topic or theme is selected, participants can generate possible questions to guide the interview. It is important to stress that these are *guiding* questions, not a rigid format which must be followed. For the interview about 'an important person in your life,' questions we generated included:

Think of an older person in your life.
Can you remember a story they used to tell you? Something they always used to say or some advice they gave you?
Where do you know them from?
How would you describe them?
Has your relationship with this person gone through any changes?
What is special about this person? Do they have any special talent or skill?
What do you mean to this person?

For the interview about an object, participants are asked to bring in or draw an object that is important to them; we generated the following questions for this topic:

What is this object?
How did it come into your life?
Where is it usually kept?
Who else uses it besides you?
Why is it important to you?
What will happen to it in the future?
What are your memories of things you've done with this object?
As you look at it, what does it make you think of?

3. Modeling, observing and reflecting on an interview: Once questions are generated, the workshop leader can interview a volunteer while participants observe the interview, noting what the interviewer does in the listening process. After we did this in our workshops, we noted the following ways (both non-verbal and verbal) that the interviewer let the interviewee know she was listening:

-maintaining eye contact
-not interrupting
-allowing for pauses and silences (without needing to fill them)
-smiling, laughing
-using body language; sometimes lightly touching the object or person
-repeating or restating to affirm what the story-teller said
-asking questions that directly follow-up on what the storyteller says
-acknowledging the emotional content of what the storyteller says ('It sounds like you have a lot to say about that.' 'That must have been very painful for you.')
-not sticking narrowly to the pre-determined interview questions but letting curiosity guide the questions; the interviewer can ask about anything that interests him/her

Issues: In addition to these observations, we discussed issues implicit in the interview process that interviewers need to be sensitive about, including:

-Certain kinds of non-verbal behavior may be culture-specific such as touching or eye contact.
-Certain kinds of questions may be culture-specific or seem invasive to the storyteller; it is important to always leave an out, telling them to feel free to say they don't want to answer a question; be sure to teach "I'd rather not talk about that."
-There is a danger of imposing one's own interpretation on what the storyteller is saying by restating or reformulating it; in addition, re-stating can be perceived as saying it better or of appearing to correct.

4. Interviewing each other: After observing and discussing the model interview, participants can sit in groups of three, taking turns being the interviewer, the interviewee and the observer; they are asked to remember points where they felt nervous, uncomfortable or unsure of what to do. This process of doing our own interviews and reflecting on how it feels to be interviewed deepened our understanding of the reasons for some of the listening behaviors and issues in doing interviews.

For example, a common feeling among interviewers was a fear of crying or of silence - not knowing what to do when people get emotional, start to cry , or are suddenly silent. Beth stressed giving interviewees the choice to talk or not to talk when a loaded issue first shows itself (with questions like 'Do you want to tell me about this?'). Our impulse is to fill the silence, but a lot happens during the silence: emotions come to the surface. Another impulse may be to try to fix a problem or say something to make the person feel better, but Beth said that it is often enough to experience the emotion *with* the person. It is important to remember that talking about a traumatic experience is part of dealing with it and, in this case, just listening to someone is a gift in itself.

The process presented here may serve as a model that teachers can adapt for ESL students; in "Oral Histories" (Talking Shop), Ann Cason describes what happened when she did this with one of her classes. The following listing illustrates a range of ways to involve students in oral history work from reading oral histories produced by others, to becoming the subjects of interviews themselves, to doing their own interviews and producing oral histories.

Oral History Activities

While many of the activities listed here are similar in form, their purposes are different. Classes may focus on only one of these or move through them sequentially from setting the tone, to reading published oral histories through the different activities until the final steps of creating a product based on interviews by students.

Setting the tone/Finding themes: Oral histories can be used to create an atmosphere of trust in the classroom; in this case, the purpose is to encourage students to share something of themselves and to listen to each other (rather than to produce a finished product). The teacher may use this time to focus on listening for important issues and concerns in students' lives (to be developed through other activities).

Reading existing oral histories: There are a number of wonderful published collections of oral history stories which can be used as culturally appropriate reading materials, to introduce the idea of oral histories, or as models for texts that students might write themselves.

Story-telling: Before doing more formal oral history interviews, students can be involved in telling and/or writing their own stories.

Teacher-conducted interviews: The teacher can model the interview process with one student in front of the class. The students can generate a list of questions to ask, observe the model interview, and discuss the interviewing process. The model interview can also be taped and transcribed for further language work; the tape can be used to teach transcribing skills with more advanced classes.

Student Interviews: After observing and discussing interviewing, students can choose a theme, makeup questions together and interview each other in class. This activity can be an end in itself or the basis for other activities (presenting each other's stories, taping,transcribing, etc.).

Guest Interviews: The teacher/students can invite a community person to class and interview him/her either as a whole class or in small groups. Again, a taping and transcribing component and/or a less structured follow-up writing can can be added (i.e. a story or newspaper article).

Community Interviews: Students can go out into the community to interview community people. They can start by making a class list of people whom they would really like to find out about (eg. people who know how to do something that they would like to do or have a special skill; people who have been in this country longer than they have; people who have dealt with issues they face - schooling, housing, parent activists, etc.). They can share tapes and include transcribing activities.

Creating a Product: They can produce a final product to share publically; this product can take a number of forms.

The Product: Presenting the Oral Histories

If a class decides to develop their oral history projects to the point of producing a concrete product, there are many possibilities beyond just writing the story. These projects can incorporate skills, music and forms that reflect students' culture and become a rich tapestry of cultural diversity. In any case, the more that students take over the production process, the more participatory the curriculum becomes.

Exhibits: Photos/objects and the stories that go with them can be displayed in the literacy center, a local library or school.

Photo-stories: A class can publish a collection of oral histories (with or without photos) for use of other students, use in children's schools, etc.

Portfolios: Photos and stories of people in a class/center can be collected in binder form as a growing resource for ongoing use (generating a site-specific set of histories).

Children's books: Individual stories from the homeland can be printed and bound (with hand-sewn binding) as volumes to bring home, give to children's schools, libraries, leave at literacy centers for childcare, etc.

Quilts: Students can each quilt a square that tells a story; squares can then be sewn together into a large quilt which is displayed with accompanying stories.

Paper quilts: Students can do drawings or other artwork of experiences with accompanying stories (same as above only on paper).

Murals: Students can paint murals depicting scenes from their own histories, homelands, experiences coming to the U.S., etc. These painting projects can be accompanied by oral histories which students themselves collect or which are collected and transcribed by others.

Storytelling celebrations: Other classes or community people can be invited to an event at which objects/photos/artwork are displayed and stories read/told.

Radio shows: Stories can be taped in radio show format with music, etc.

Slide shows: Students can take slides of people telling stories with objects/photos/ community sites, and an audiotape of the story-telling to accompany it, with music, etc.

Video-tapes: Same as above, with videos of storytelling.

Add your own:

Through students' eyes...

Here one of the students in the FOCUS Project talks about what the approach described in this chapter meant to her:

In my opinion the Focus Program is interesting, because I can express my ideas about real life.

Sometimes, when I saw some pictures, I remembered things, I had experienced in the past.

Other pictures I saw took me places I had never been and gave me new experiences.

My teachers and my classmates shared a lot in Focus Program.

I feel we have a family with us.

BLANCA MARZÁN
April 13, 1988

Chapter 7

ACTION: Using Literacy to Make Change

The bottom line in a participatory approach is *action* - using literacy to address real issues and make changes in the social context through collective effort. As Wallerstein (1983:16) says,

> *Critical thinking begins when people make the connections between their individual lives and social conditions. It ends one step beyond perception - toward the action people take to regain control over social structures detrimental to their lives.*

Initially, we interpreted this to mean that the outcome of classroom interaction around each issue had to be some form of concrete, visible action outside the classroom - that addressing an issue didn't 'count' if it wasn't followed by an immediate attempt to change the conditions of students' lives. But given this analysis, we had to ask ourselves whether our practice really achieved this goal. As themes developed in our classes, they led in many directions, few of which were organized attempts to make direct changes outside the classroom. Where were the examples of students fighting for better housing conditions after a unit on housing, resisting employment discrimination after a unit on work, or participating in parents' groups after a unit on schooling? Measuring our practice by this narrow standard, it seemed that instances of action were few and far between.

Yet clearly, our students were making changes, both individually and collectively. Rosa (who wrote about time running fast in Chapt. 1) went to community college; Hilda (who wrote about the importance of helping your child's teacher in Chapt. 1) became more active in her school PTA; Angel (whose poetry appears in Chapt. 6), had many of his writings published and read his work publically at several events; Maria became a member of a Hispanic parents' advocacy group; Quisqueya's daughter received a merit award in school after almost having been kept back and Nilsa joined a softball team. The stories go on.

Classes made internal changes, improving attendance, learning to work cooperatively, helping each other with problems. Roles changed to the point where students felt comfortable telling the teacher they were sick of an activity, refusing to go on with it and suggesting something else instead. For some, action took the form of choosing to write in their own language as an affirmation of identity; for others, it meant gaining the confidence to write in English without fear of mistakes. In one site, a class developed guidelines for discussing personal issues and strategies for increasing safety in coming to class; in another, classes discussed criteria for hiring new teachers, presenting their ideas at center-wide meetings to determine hiring criteria and procedures. Classes used literacy to provide support in their communities: one group of mothers wrote letters of advice to pregnant teenagers in another city; another class developed a housing project newsletter. Whole classes participated in public hearings about ESL services and funding; individual students got up and testified before hundreds of people at these public meetings. Students discussed English Only legislation and went as a group to hearings at the State House. They wrote letters to the Governor about cuts in services and letters to the editor about cases of discrimination.

What we learned from all this is that change takes many forms, both inside and outside the classroom. Rather than being packaged only in discrete actions, it is often a non-linear, non-sequential process which develops unevenly. As such, action may not, as we originally thought, be the direct result of particular curriculum units; rather, it may be the result of invisible changes - the cumulative building of confidence, validation of experience and reflection on context. Very often it takes months or even years of germination before students are ready to move outside the classroom with their actions. During this time, the changing social relations within the classroom, the critical examination of day to day reality, and the development of language and literacy are all functioning as a kind of rehearsal for external action.

Examples

A closer examination of the examples of Maria, the student who became a member of the Hispanic parents' advocacy group, and Nilsa, who joined a softball team, illuminates how we came to reinterpret the meaning of action. Maria was a student in one of Loren's classes for over a year; during this time, the class did extensive work on issues of community, schooling, and bilingualism. Although she had strong concerns about the schooling of Hispanic children in Boston, she aired them primarily in class, but did little about them outside of class. However, shortly after the class ended, when the Hispanic Parent Association was formed to fight for school reform, she was one of the first parents to join. She attended meetings with the Superintendent, press conferences and organizational meetings and actively tried to recruit others. When the time was right for her, and the external conditions conducive, she was able to act on ideas which had been developing over time. Her participation didn't result from a particular lesson or a code, but from many months of dialogue, and from the support and confidence she gained from her class.

The second example taught us that an action doesn't need to take an explicitly political form to signify change in students' relation to the social context of their lives - it may take a form completely different from anything we anticipated. In this case, students in one of Charo's classes were discussing a picture of a woman surrounded by cooking, housework and childcare responsibilities (from the Women's Tool Kit 1987). This led to a discussion of what motherhood means; students listed all they people they are, using the format "Women are _____" (mothers, cooks, etc.). Someone said, "Women are persons" and the conversation turned toward individuals' desires and goals; students talked about what they wanted to do for themselves and obstacles in pursuing their own interests. Nilsa talked about the fact that she never had time for herself, to do what she wanted to do for her own enjoyment and development; the group talked about why - that maybe her husband didn't support her in this. A few weeks later, she came to class and announced that she had joined a women's softball team! Through the discussion and support of the class, she had decided to assert her desire to do this in her family and had done it. Even though it was an individual action, it was possible because of what had happened in class.

ISSUES: I can't do anything - I don't have any rights here!

The common reaction as students consider taking action is fear: often students are afraid of making waves because they are immigrants and in some cases, undocumented. They don't want to do anything to draw attention to themselves or jeopardize their status here. Clearly, it is impossible to consider action without considering its consequences, and students may well know better than we do what is or isn't dangerous for them. In some cases, however, this fear immobilizes students, making them unable to even consider ways of improving the conditions in their lives. Our role in this is not to impose our own views of what students should or shouldn't do, but rather to make the classroom a safe place to consider the possibilities. Of course, legal status is an extremely delicate subject, which must be handled with extreme care; but, precisely because it is so loaded, it is important to recognize and explore its ramifications with students. Our experience has been that students are eager for information and a chance to talk about it if it is broached sensitively.

First, raising the issue in a depersonalized way (through stories about other people, in the third person) helps to make it safer; Unit V, Lesson 1 of ESL for Action (Auerbach and Wallerstein) provide examples of how to do this. Another way of doing this is by presenting a news story or external event (like the changes in the immigration law) to introduce the topic in a context removed from a personal situations.

Second, providing legal information about the rights of the foreign-born gives students a sense of their protections (or lack of protection); discussion of this information should be contextualized in analysis of the strengths and the limits of legal strategies. Inviting outside speakers is not only a way to deal with questions beyond the teacher's knowledge, but also puts students in contact with community resources.

Third, and most importantly, is presenting examples of success stories - news articles or personal accounts of cases where immigrants successfully acted to make change. In Boston, for example, Local 26 of the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union, have achieved a number of highly publicized victories - one in which room cleaners resisted changes in their working conditions, another in which the union won a courtcase against a landlord who was recruiting immigrant tenants, charging them high rents and refusing to make repairs because, as he said, "they pay their rent without arguing." Examples like these not only show that change is possible but provide rich lessons in how to go about the process.

I'll get fired!

A related issue is students' legitimate concern about individual consequences to their actions. They may feel that if they take a stand (eg. write a letter, challenge a landlord or boss), they might be singled out for some form of retribution - they could lose their job, get evicted, harrassed or investigated. For example, some students were reluctant to sign the letter about police discrimination, fearing that they would be somehow 'punished' for their actions.

In addressing this concern, it is important that the teacher not impose his/her counterarguments, but rather draw out the divergence of perspectives from the group. Certainly, urging students to take individual actions with no built-in protection would be irresponsible. More importantly, the real learning comes when students see that their collective resources are their strength. Our experience has been that they very often arrive at the understanding that there is both power and safety in numbers through dialogue. This discussion is as important as whatever decision is reached. The key is on the one hand creating a forum for examining possibilities together and on the other trusting the students to do what they are comfortable with. In the case of the letter to the editor, students went through a long debate about whether to sign it, with several students refusing to do so, but in the end, everyone signed it anyway.

It's not my issue!

Often students are reluctant to become involved in actions that don't directly affect them. They may not want to be bothered, not see the importance or relevance of the action, or just be uninterested. A case in point was the issue of a school closing in the neighborhood where one of our sites was located. When one student brought a petition to class for others to sign, several class members felt the issue didn't concern them because they didn't have children at the school. Others argued that the school closing would increase the drop-out rate, affecting neighborhood safety for everyone; that if this happened in one school, it could happen in another; and that a united community effort would increase the chances of a successful campaign. In the end, most of the students signed.[1] Again is, the discussion process enabled the various arguments to be aired so students could arrive at their own conclusions.

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[1]In fact, because of broad-based community resistance (that this discussion was part of), the school remained open.

Example

The changes in the immigration laws were very much on students' mind during the fall of 1988; there was a citywide hearing and demonstration which provided an external focus for discussing students' concerns. However, this was an issue that impacted students differently, since some were citizens already (eg. Puerto Ricans), some were refugees, some were immigrants and others undocumented. The following excerpt from our minutes shows how Ann's class addressed these issues.

Ann started with a True/False questionnaire with attitude questions like "If there were a march about the new immigration law, no one would come" to get at people's ideas, fears and opinions about participation. This brought out discussion about all the reasons people might not participate - time, family committments, fear. Many students said they are afraid of being caught right there at a march. One student had participated in various kinds of actions and was able to talk about her experiences; she said that it's not like it is in home countries where people are grabbed at events. But people's fears are real and we can't offer them assurances that nothing will happen. Ann then brought in a reading about a community coming together to help during the 1930's as a example. We also suggested asking students (like the woman who did participate actively), "What makes people to decide to participate?" which might help them to think about whether and under what conditions it's worth it to them to take action.

We also talked about how to explore the relevance of the issue for people not directly affected by the laws. Some suggestions were:

-asking students "What did you do to get here?" (outlining the different steps for each group) as a way to develop some understanding and empathy for the different situations of immigrants, refugees, Puerto Ricans, etc. and to find the common ground.

-using quotes from the newspaper about possible effects of the new laws as catalysts.

-asking how the new law will affect everyone's possibilities and work situations as well as children's possibilities. Even if students aren't working themselves, many have teenage children whose chances for finding work may be affected.

Nothing ever changes anyway!

Fatalism, cynicism and scepticism are also prevalent among students. Many feel that their situations are inevitable, or that the world will always be the way it is. Addressing this concern, which is after all the ultimate goal of participatory education, is an ongoing process. Again, *showing* is more powerful than *telling:* this can be done by a combination of focusing on finite issues with possible immediate strategies, introducing success stories, social analysis and reliance on group resources.

But what happens when a group takes the step toward action and the action fails to achieve the desired outcome? For example, after students went through the long process of formulating a letter about police discrimination (the many stages of drafting, the decision about where to send it, the decision about whether to sign individual names, etc.), and finally sent it to a citywide newspaper, it never was published. Clearly, seeing the letter in print or getting a response would have been a happier ending. However, it is important to remember that this is a problem-*posing* process, not a problem-solving process. It is inevitable that some actions will meet with success and others won't. The analysis that the action is embedded in is more important than its actual result. "Failures" cease to be problematic if the teacher doesn't set the students up to expect positive results for each action, but rather uses the outcome to deepen the understanding of the social context. The class can analyze why the action got the response it did, what the response shows about the institutions it was directed toward, and what else they might have done or could do in the future. Even when an action meets with students' expectations, it may raise new issues (eg. once parents met with the Superintendent, they had to figure out how to deal with his response). This kind of evaluation is an esstential step component of the critical thinking - action - critical thinking cycle.

In each of these examples of issues that arise in considering and taking action, the central point is that *the process is as important as the outcome.* We have found that if the teacher draws out the diversity of experience and creates an atmosphere where students can express their perspectives openly, the resources of the group are often rich enough to address the concerns outlined here. More importantly, the dialogue leading up to and following decisions to take action determine students' ability to extend critical thinking to new domains. Going through the steps of the critical thinking process, learning to analyze the social context and relying on group resources are the real benefits of participatory education.

Further Examples
Articles about the Hispanic parents' advocacy group

28 THE BOSTON GLOBE THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1988

Hispanic parents demand talks with Wilson

By Gus Martins
Contributing Reporter

A group of Hispanic parents, united under a new citywide organization, yesterday demanded that Superintendent of Schools Laval S. Wilson resume discussions with them about how to decrease the dropout rate among Hispanic students.

Members of the Hispanic Parents Association, formed in the last four weeks, said they felt snubbed by Wilson, who last month told them he was suspending monthly meetings with them until they formed a citywide group.

The group also protested a comment by Wilson in the Sunday New York Times two weeks ago calling it "discriminatory" to form special programs or initiatives to lower the dropout rate among Hispanics.

At a news conference at School Department headquarters on Court Street, group members said more Hispanic administrators and faculty members are needed to counsel students to remain in school and deal with their emotional needs.

"First of all, we are here to make him keep his promise of meeting Hispanic parents on a monthly basis and to see if we can come to an agreement on [improving] the education of Hispanic students," said Juanita Rivera, whose 13-year-old son is enrolled at the Clarence R. Edwards Middle School in Charlestown.

HISPANIC PARENTS MOBILIZE IN BOSTON

Saying a 'Pattern of Neglect' Has Led to Dropouts, They Urge School Programs

By SUSAN DIESENHOUSE
Special to The New York Times

BOSTON, Dec. 8 — Accusing the Boston schools of "a pattern of neglect," a group of parents has mobilized to press officials to give special attention to Hispanic students not in bilingual education programs.

Most Hispanic children here speak English and thus are not enrolled in such programs, and school officials say they have a higher dropout rate than those who are. Hispanic children over all have the city's highest dropout rate.

The Hispanic Parents Association, a group of about two dozen members that met for the first time last night, says a dropout prevention program needs to be designed especially for students who are not in bilingual programs.

The parents say these students, al-

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BOSTON GLOBE 1/31/89

Hispanic parents complain to Wilson in 1st meeting

Hispanic parents, in a long-awaited meeting with Boston School Superintendent Laval S. Wilson, last night voiced anger over the School Department's failure to provide a Spanish translation of the proposed school assignment plan.

During the South End meeting, Wilson's first with the recently formed Hispanic Parent Association, he said his staff will begin translating a summary of the controversial plan today.

"How can you have parent involvement when you don't translate these important documents?" demanded Javier Colon, attorney for the association.

The group also protested a comment by Wilson in the Sunday New York Times two weeks ago calling it "discriminatory" to form special programs or initiatives to lower the dropout rate among Hispanics.

At a news conference at School Department headquarters on Court Street, group members said more Hispanic administrators and faculty members are needed to counsel students to remain in school and deal with their emotional needs.

"First of all, we are here to make him keep his promise of meeting Hispanic parents on a monthly basis and to see if we can come to an agreement on [improving] the education of Hispanic students," said Juanita Rivera, whose 13-year-old son is enrolled at the Clarence R. Edwards Middle School in Charlestown.

been waiting to meet with him since last fall.

Last night parents crowded the Youth Center at Villa Victoria in Boston's South End and vented their frustrations over the lack of bilingual staff members in the city's schools, low promotion rates among Hispanic students and the curriculum for Hispanic students.

State Rep. Nelson Merced (D-Dorchester) summed up the situation saying, "Our kids are not getting an education! The problems are clear. They don't need to be studied, they need to be solved!"

Although Wilson promised to meet with the association monthly when it was formed last fall

Letter to State Representatives about changes in adult education programming

HABLE PROGRAM
English as a Second Language

The Cardinal Cushing Center
for the Spanish Speaking
1375 Washington Street
Boston, Mass,, 02118

December 14, 1988

Dear:
Ms Patricia McGovern
Mr.Richard Voke
Mr.Scaccia
Mr.Kennth Lemanski
Senate Ways and Means
House Ways and Means

We are happy that you have released the adult Education funds.

We specially wish to thank John Schindler and Gina Martinez and the staff for meeting with us and the students from other adult education agencies on Wednesday, Dec. 7 when we went to the State House. Their explanations and assurances helped to relieve our great anxieties.

We hope you will keep the Dept. of Education separate from the Dept. of Employment and Training. We need to learnEnglish well before entering job training programs.

Please help us for a better life.

Thank You.

Marry Christmas!

Article about participation in city-wide funding initiative

Publisher, mayor launch literacy fund to help all residents share city's boom

By David Arnold
Globe Staff

The mayor and a newspaper publisher put the polish on yesterday's kickoff for a major public-private partnership aimed at fighting adult illiteracy, but the quiet words from three shy and once-illiterate residents gave the event its guts.

Mayor Flynn and William O. Taylor, publisher of The Boston Globe, launched the Adult Literacy Fund Inc., which aims to raise $5 million in the next five years to augment existing community literacy programs.

"One in eight American families are functionally illiterate," Taylor told an estimated 75 people packed shoulder-to-shoulder in a conference room in the Cardinal Cushing Center on Washington Street. Members of these families not only are unable to read a newspaper, Taylor said, but they cannot even read an election ballot.

Flynn said, "We've seen what some might call a boom in the downtown area, but we must make sure the people of Boston's neighborhoods don't get left behind."

Boston has 55,000 adults over age 25 who have less than an eighth-grade education, speakers said during the news conference. One of three Boston adults has not completed high school.

Marian Maroney, the fund's executive director, said fund organizers expect to have $1 million at work by the end of 1989. Fund-raising will target sources not already supporting the 30 existing community-based adult programs, which serve fewer than 4 percent of those estimated to be in need. Yesterday's announcement comes on the heels of the state release Monday of $8 million, budgeted last year to fund literacy programs across the state for the second half of the current fiscal year.

The literacy fund will bolster community programs by providing money for needs such as additional teachers, better salaries and child care. Community programs to benefit from the fund include WAITT House in Roxbury, the Cardinal Cushing Center and the Charlestown Community School, represented yesterday by students Theresa Watson, Maria Rivera and Helen Galafano respectively.

To a hushed audience, the women told stories about life on welfare and educations short-circuited, by mothering responsibilities at age 13 or a move from Puerto Rico at age 11. Now they are about to earn high school di
ther good jobs
in the near fu
community ac
grams.

"It's been h
Watson said,
back tears, sh
every adult co
morning and
themselves."

Photo: Margarita Henriquez

Redefining action

Looking at these accumulated experiences over time, we began to realize that what was wrong was not so much our practice, but our initial concept of action. Just as we couldn't predetermine curriculum content, we couldn't predetermine the forms action should take. Students changed at their own rates, when they were ready and in terms of their own needs. Sometimes these changes were individual, internal and invisible; sometimes they were collective, external and explicit.

An important aspect of this was realizing that the context and composition of the class shapes the possibilities for action. If students come from many parts of the city, different backgrounds, or different employment situations, they don't have these areas of their lives in common, so group action around issues arising from them is less possible/likely. For these groups, action may take place primarily inside the classroom, in terms of changes in classroom dynamics and language/literacy accomplishments (publishing writing, producing photostories, etc.).

While we felt the lack of an external organizational base as a constraint on certain kinds of action, it became clear that there were a wealth of forms that action *could* take, and, to be genuinely participatory, we couldn't direct students only toward those outcomes that fit with our preconceptions. Rather, what we had to do is challenge students to link what was happening in class to their lives outside of class and validate changes as they took place. In addition, we had to understand that the consequences of what happens in class don't always take place during the teaching cycle itself and that, in fact, we may never see the actions that result from our work.

Finally, we had to realize that group actions don't fall from the sky, with whole groups deciding to do something at once, but rather that they often start with one or two people taking the initiative, having a success which others hear about and begin to network around. With these realizations in mind, we moved toward an expanded concept of action that included the following forms:

Form of Action	Examples
Individual, personal	
internal	gains in self confidence, affective changes
external	joining softball team becoming active in community/school organizations
literacy-related	publishing writing reading work at public events changing uses of literacy in everyday life affirming identity through use of first language
In Class	determining curriculum content asserting preferences for activities addressing issues of classroom dynamics (attendance, uneven participation, use of L1 vs. L2, handling of personal information) rehearsing for outside action class publications or productions (photo-stories, anthologies of student writing)
In Site	participating in evaluation/decision-making participating in hiring participating in advocacy actvities
In Family	diversifying literacy uses changing dynamics around literacy (becoming independent of children, gaining confidence in helping children) gaining pride in first language/culture reinforcing home culture and use of L1
In relation to school	participating in school events advocating for child/children
In relation to immediate community	joining community organizations or activities (parents' group, action to keep school open) taking on new responsibilities (helping others with literacy tasks dealing bureaucracy, etc.) strengthening community ties (through newsletter, networking)
In broader community	participating in funding hearings participating in demonstrations on bilingual education writing letters to the editor writing letters/petitioning officials

The last word: Action for English - English for action[2]

We want to speak English very well, that's the reason we are coming school. English class is very important because if you can't speak English, you can't work for much money. We want to study English but we don't have too much time to go to school. America is very expensive. If you speak a little English you have a hard job and little money. Haitians are good workers. We work hard but no money When I work, people talk to me and I can't answer. When I want to say something I don't have too much

[2]By beginning literacy students in preparation for testimony at citywide hearings about funding for ESL.

English to say that.
If you speak English good, read English good, and write English good, you can work for more money.
We want to read English, write English and speak English. 3 hours of school is not enough. We want more hours. We want books, too.
We want the government to help us
We want the government to help us learn English and help us learn for better jobs.

Chapter 8

EVALUATION: What Counts as Progress?

The final question we need to consider in curriculum development is *'What does it all add up to?"* or, more accurately, *'How do we determine what it adds up to?'* Unfortunately, this question of evaluating progress is one of the most problematic and neglected in adult literacy. Balliro (1989:1) characterizes the dilemma many of us face when she says:

> *Like many adult educators, over the years I've put energy into just about every area of the instructional process: methodology, curriculum design, materials development, program design - every area except assessment. I shied away from courses on tests and measurements because the underlying assumption - that you could somehow measure learning gains in an objective, scientific way - was inconsistent with what I thought about how people learn. I viewed the tests I was sometimes required to administer as somehow external to the teaching/learning process, something the students had to endure for the sake of funding purposes. However, like many adult educators, I've also been concerned about how my students are progressing. Are they learning language? Are they better able to read and write? Are they getting what they want out of the class? How could I answer these questions so I could, after all, improve my teaching?*

Currently, a kind of tug of war exists between funders/ administrators and practitioners/educators over what counts as success and how to 'measure' it. The former often insist on concrete, quantifiable, and 'objective' indications of progress, while the latter resist or disagree with the forms of evaluation demanded of

them. However, because continued funding depends on complying with funders' mandates, a charade ensues, with teachers going through the motions to make their 'numbers' look good (it is not uncommon for teachers to privately admit fudging their paperwork to show progress), while never having the time or energy to develop other forms of evaluation which more genuinely reflect their perspectives on adult learning.

This was an issue that we struggled with throughout the life of our Family Literacy Project: how could we document what students were actually learning in a way that corresponded to our philosophy while at the same time satisfying demands for accountability? One of the great luxuries of our project was that we were not mandated to show success in terms of standardized tests, grade levels, etc. We were in the fortunate position of having both the time and the staff development framework that allowed us to explore this question, try different approaches suggested by others and attempt to develop our own responses. In this chapter, we will present an overview and critique of current approaches, trace our own thinking on evaluation and suggest some specific assessment/evaluation forms and procedures that are congruent with participatory adult literacy; much of what is proposed draws heavily on the work of others who share our perspective. This is by no means a fully developed, definitive alternative evaluation scheme, but rather a proposal for a process which needs to be refined through collective practice and reflection by adult educators in different contexts. In fact, as you will see, we came to an understanding that it is impossible to have one form of evaluation that will fit every context or group of students. As such, this chapter should, like the previous ones, be seen as a tool kit of resources for evaluation which can be selected from and adapted.

Before proceeding, a word on terminology is in order. Often assessment and evaluation are used interchangeably. Nunan (1988:118) distinguishes these terms by referring to assessment as "the set of processes by which we judge student learning" and evaluation as a broader term including but going beyond assessment to encompass other processes. Evaluation is more interpretative and explanatory in that it looks behind the data on student progress to understand why students are/are not progressing and to inform decision-making about curriculum and program design.

What is your starting point?

As in previous chapters, we'd like to start by asking you to reflect a little on your past experience or current practice. Again, if you are working with a group, discuss your responses together.

1. **What/who** gets evaluated in your program?
   - -students (student learning/progress)?
   - -teachers (teacher effectiveness)?
   - -administrators (administrator effectiveness)?
   - -curriculum content?
   - -overall program design?
   - -course materials/texts?
   - -assessment instruments/evaluation procedures?
   - -program impact in the community?
   - -other? _____

2. **When** are assessment and evaluation conducted?
   - -before instruction?
   - -after instruction?
   - -ongoing?

3. **Who** does the evaluating?
   - -students?
   - -teachers?
   - -support staff (eg. counselors)?
   - -administrators?
   - -external evaluators?
   - -other? _____

4. **How** is student assessment conducted?
   - -oral interviews?
   - -tests (what kind? standardized/program-developed?)
   - -performance standards (measures of competencies)?
   - -collections of student work (writing samples)?
   - -observation of classroom interactions?
   - -self-report?
   - -ongoing documentation (teacher reports)?
   - -other? _____

5. **What counts** as progress?
   -reading level gains?
   -test scores?
   -affective gains in self-confidence, etc.?
   -ability to use language/literacy outside the class?
   -ability to make personal, family, school, classroom and/or community changes?
   -other? _____

6. **Who** gets the results/findings from assessment/evaluation?
   -students?
   -teachers?
   -program administrators?
   -funders?
   -other? _____

7. **How** are the results/findings of assessment/evaluation used?
   -for placement and promotion?
   -to inform curriculum development?
   -to provide feedback to students on their own learning?
   -to provide information to funders?
   -to inform curriculum design?
   -other? _____

8. What do you like about this about your current assessment/evaluation system?

9. What do you dislike about it?

10. Why do you think it is set up the way it is? Whose interests does the current set-up serve?

11. How would you change it if you could?

What characterizes the predominant model of evaluation?

When Balliro (1989) surveyed teachers, administrators and funders of adult ESL programs in New England, she found a picture of concern for accountability on the one hand, and dissatisfaction with existing assessment procedures on the other. Because of what she calls "external demands for standardized accountability of progress," most programs assessed students in terms of externally defined criteria - either performance standards like those of the MELT (Mainstream English Language Training) curriculum or tests like the standardized BEST (Basic English Skills Test) and CASAS (California Adult Student Assessment System) or home-grown tests.

Although the sample in Balliro's study was small, it reflects the current paradigm for ESL literacy assessment nationally, a paradigm which can be characterized as stressing "accountability through quantification." The bottom line for program, curriculum and teacher evaluation is the ability to show student progress through numbers. As Taylor (1989) says, there is an implicit assumption that, "if it doesn't have a number it doesn't count." Achievement is based on performance on uniform, externally defined, 'objective' measures; many states mandate use of specific standardized tests like the TABE (Tests of Adult Basic Education), the ABLE (Adult Basic Learning Examination), the BEST or performance criteria like those of MELT. These tests often focus on decontextualized word recognition, sentence or paragraph comprehension skills, using paper and pencil formats with multiple choice/fill in the blank questions. Even with performance standards or program-designed tests, outcomes are strictly regulated in terms of measurability (test scores, reading levels, performance standards, numbers of students promoted or placed); funding is contingent on attaining predefined acceptable outcomes; some programs are even paid on a head count basis for those students actually placed in jobs.

Assessment is usually done on a pre-/post-test basis; in-take tests, often done by support staff, are used for placement but not to inform instruction or curriculum development (since teachers either don't see the results or see only the scores). As one teacher (cited by Balliro) said, "There's no relationship between what's tested initially and what's taught in class." Further, results are rarely shared with students. Ongoing informal assessments by teachers don't usually count for program evaluation purposes. Exit tests, according to Balliro (1989) are used, "to place students...., to provide information for the next teacher..., or to determine a grade," but rarely to inform students about the development of their own learning.

What's wrong with this model?

Teachers' reservations about this paradigm are pervasive. The most common complaint is that instruction suffers because of paperwork demands: time that could be spent on preparation or teaching instead is taken up by testing and filling in forms. However, critiques go far deeper than these logistical issues: researchers argue that the tests don't correspond to the students' reality, don't measure what they claim to measure, and, most importantly, can be damaging to the literacy learning process because of the messages they send.

***Testing is not appropriate or feasible for early literacy learners:** One of the teachers Balliro interviewed said that she realized the futility of administering the BEST test (supposedly designed for low literate ESL students) because her students "couldn't even hold it right." Another educator claims that 40% of those who qualify for the amnesty ESL classes don't even place on the entry tests because their levels are so low (personal communication). For these students, testing leads to nothing but a sense of frustration and inadequacy.

***Funders' demands lead to "creaming:"** Often programs are forced to accept only those students who are proficient enough to make short-term gains on tests or be quickly placed in jobs since these are the measures that determine continued funding; this means that the lowest level students are excluded from services since it takes longer for them to show progress on tests or become ready for employment.

***The testing process itself is intimidating and demeaning:** Because of prior negative experiences, students may feel uncomfortable about being subjected to tests. For many adults, testing triggers associations with childhood failures, or with being judged on the basis of what they *can't* do rather than what they *can* do. It is stressful and anxiety-provoking. Dugan et al (1987) claim that tests like the TABE, adapted from tests for middle class children, is inappropriate for adults: questions about farm animals and birds in the park are irrelevant and insulting.

***Framing results in terms of grade levels is destructive:** Schema research suggests that reading performance varies according to task, context, content and purpose. Grade level descriptors don't capture this variability, yet they continue to be used to indicate proficiency. This, as Lytle (1988:2), says, sends a negative message: "When...adults are informed that their performance is comparable to second or third graders, much more is being communicated than an objective description of ability."

***The concept and content of standardized testing is culture-specific:** Dugan et al (1987) found that even for highly literate college ESL graduates, the concept of standardized tests was culturally unfamiliar; for those with little prior education, the process of testing may be even more alien. Further, test content often presupposes culture-specficic knowledge and vocabulary, which, as schema research indicates, immediately biases the tests against those from other cultures.. As Dugan et al say, to subject ESL students to a test like the TABE, "which is first alien to their previous experience and second does not reflect their abilities, is unconscionable and objectionable."

***The claim for objectivity in testing is misleading:** One of the primary arguments for the use of standardized tests - that they are *objective* - has been widely challenged. Johnston (in press) questions the possibility of obtaining objective, valid, unbiased empirical descriptions of human learning, arguing that evaluation of human learning is always, by definition, interpretive. Both the processes we are examining and the tools for examining them are cultural in nature and situated in a social context; hence, the notion of a 'pure' measure of reading ability is fraught with problems. Dugan et al's (1987) analysis of the TABE debunks the myth of its objectivity as an instrument for assessing Adult ESL.

***Existing tests measure the wrong things:** Since it is easier to tabulate discrete answers, tests focus on subskills like letter and word recognition (assessed by reading isolated word lists), ability to recall specific facts and perform tasks with pre-determined outcomes, promoting a reductionist view of literacy. As Goodman (cited in Berglund 1989:34) says, research points to a "rejection of the concept of teaching parts, but we are continually pushed to use tests that focus on parts."

***....and fail to measure the right ones:** Overemphasis on skills which can be counted leads to the neglect of other important aspects of literacy like critical thinking, creativity, and real world literacy usage which are less amenable to measurement. Dugan et al (1987) claim that the test-taking conditions themselves differ from real world contexts for literacy use where meaning can be negotiated and literacy is a social activity: "It is only in the educational setting that we insist so relentlessly on this notion of a 'solo performance'"(1987: 23). Most importantly, tests fail to reveal the ways that adult learners can and do use literacy in daily life; students are rarely asked to read and respond to whole passages, to create meaning through writing or to indicate how their attitudes and usage of literacy in daily life changed as a result of instruction (Lytle et al 1986).

***Tests don't provide information about affective and metacognitive factors in literacy acquisition:** The impact of literacy on students' family life, personal growth, effectiveness at work or ability to make changes in their lives isn't reflected by test scores, although they are among the most important effects from students' perspective (see Lytle et al 1986). While research indicates that factors like learners' internalized model of the reading process, awareness of their own reading strategies, motivation, ability to utilize prior knowledge and identify text structure are key in proficient reading, none of these are assessed by standardized tests. Because tests focus on product rather than process, they have little explanatory power: the reasons underlying results are obscured and neglected.

***Performance-based assessment and competency checklists avoid some of these pitfalls but perpetuate others:** Measures of performance on real life tasks (like competency tests) are a step forward from traditional tests, but still have shortcomings (see Auerbach, 1986). Purposes continue to be determined externally and measured quantitatively without regard to affective or metacognitive factors; content is often still reductionist in its focus on isolated competencies or behaviors. Assessment goals continue to shape instruction; as one of the teachers in Balliro's study said, "We didn't want a competency checklist, either, because it pre-determines what is taught." Most importantly, the emphasis on teaching life skills for functioning in the society as it exists carries an implicit agenda of uncritical acceptance of the status quo which serves to perpetuate existing social relations.

***Testing shapes teaching:** Despite teachers' best intentions, the tail wags the dog - if program evaluation is based on test performance, inevitably, curricula are geared toward teaching to the tests. Since the tests generally measure subskills, this is what gets taught. Balliro's (1989) accounts of teachers spending class time to rehearsing students for test items are all too familiar to ESL teachers as is her claim that, "assessment often determines the content of instruction and is often contradictory to assumptions we have about literacy and language acquisition."

***Testing and teaching-to-tests reinforces a bottom-up view of literacy:** The subskills testing test-oriented instruction may, as Eno (in Lytle et al, 1986:20), reinforce "distorted notions that students... [have] about what is involved in learning to read and write, i.e., that reading is sounding out words and writing is handwriting." Even when literacy is presented holistically (with a focus on using it for real purposes, critical thinking, linking it to students' experience and prior knowledge), if the tests contain de-contextualized word lists or paragraphs with multiple choice questions, the instructional message is undermined.

***The testing model conflicts with a student-centered model of adult learning:** An important aspect of adult learning is student control and involvement in determining the goals, objectives and content of learning; yet the test-oriented paradigm removes control from students. "This view of evaluation puts the power and the responsibility for the program outcomes in the hands of the educators and leaves the learner as yet another object in the learning enterprise, one which is done to and done for rather than done with" (Sauvé 1987:56). Students neither participate in assessing their own learning, nor use results for their own purposes.

Increasingly, in the past few years, these challenges have come not just from the grass roots, from mainstream professional organizations and educators. The Board of Directors of the International Reading Association, for example, issued the following statement (1988): *"Reading assessment must reflect recent advances in the understanding of the reading process. IRA is concerned that instructional decisions are too often made from assessments which define reading as a sequence of discrete skills that students must master to become readers. Such assessments foster inappropriate instruction."* A growing body of research supports the view that the teacher rather than the test is the "critical evaluation instrument" (Johnston in press). In adult/ESL literacy as well, there are increasing calls for changes in existing assessment practices by researchers and practitioners (Balliro 1989, Lytle 1986 et al, Hemmindinger 1988)[1].

[1] Perhaps the single most concise statement of the rationale for these changes and the features of an alternative, student-centered model can be found in Susan Lytle's article in Focus on Basics (2:1, Fall 1988).

Developing an alternative

While the critique of the testing paradigm has been clearly articulated and there is growing concensus that change is needed, there is as yet no agreement on the particular forms it should take. Lytle (1988:4) argues that what's needed is "program-based practitioner research conducted simultaneously in many sites." A national Alternative Evaluation Network has been set up as a focal point for this exploration. This is a period of experimentation which, as in any paradigm shift, precedes broad acceptance of a new model. Since existing tests didn't fit either our students or our philosophy, we saw our own work as part of this exploratory shift and set ourselves the task of finding alternatives.

The first questions we faced were *"Who and what is assessment for? What is its purpose?"* Our starting point was the understanding that assessment must correspond to program philosophy and goals, since, as Lytle et al (1986:22) said, "Assessment procedures embody and thus convey particular concepts about literacy." We wanted assessment to serve curriculum development rather than vice versa. Since our primary concerns in curriculum development were to involve students in shaping their own learning and make literacy meaningful in addressing their own purposes, we wanted, as Andy Nash (1989) said, to "find or create new assessment tools that: 1) provide more useful information for teachers and students; and 2) include students in the process of setting goals and evaluating their own progress toward those goals."

The second question we faced was, *"What counts as progress?"* Since program goals emphasized using literacy to make changes both individually and collectively, indications of progress had to go beyond one-shot test or competency performance to include looking at ongoing changes in literacy use and everyday life both inside and outside the classroom. These may include changes in self-concept, attitudes, or conceptions of literacy, diversification of reading and writing practices in everyday life, actions resulting from program participation as well as totally unexpected, unpredictable changes. Many of these are subjective, intangible changes which aren't amenable to quantification: what really matters can't be counted.

This led us to the question, *"How can these kinds of progress be assessed?"*. Since the goal of instruction is related to the significance of literacy in everyday life, we felt that the starting point had to be some kind of start-up exploration of what students are already doing with literacy, where and how they use it, how they conceptualize it and what changes they want to make.

Our thinking here was influenced by Lytle et al who had developed a two-hour in-take interview for ABE students designed to "emphasize comptence, process and use rather than deficiency and to explore the different roles that literacy plays in the lives of different people" (1986:30). The interview investigated students' life circumstances, educational and employment backgrounds, social networks and community involvement, reasons for seeking further education, ways they already use reading and writing, and conceptions about literacy processes. It also assessed literacy proficiency by giving students a range of contextualized tasks to choose from (including reading real world materials and passages written by other literacy students as models for their own writing).

We liked many aspects of this approach (finding out how and where students already use literacy and what they think about it, and giving them choices about what to read and write in demonstrating their proficiency). At the same time, we questioned the feasiblity of detailed individual interviews with students whose English is minimal and were concerned that interviews would be too time consuming and cumbersome. Further, we were concerned about asking personal questions, fearing the process might seem intrusive and reinforce a power differential (between interviewer and interviewee). Most importantly, we wanted to be sure that assessment contributed to, rather than detracting from or interfering with instruction. Thus, teachers proposed an in-class approach, geared toward getting at a cultural sense of literacy for groups of students, which could become part of the curriculum itself .

We came up with an initial plan to develop three kinds of assessment tools designed as in-class activities for the beginning and end of each cycle: 1) a series of activities and questions designed to get at the kind of information in Lytle's in-take interview, but geared toward classes as a whole rather than individual students; 2) a collection of thematically organized readings with highly relevant content selected both from student writings and published sources (literature, etc.) at a range of levels of difficulty which students could choose; 3) a set of pictures about learning situations to catalyze writing which would become the basis for exploring student conceptions about education as well as provide writing samples. Our original idea was that we would begin and end each cycle with the same activities, assessing how students' reading, writing and ideas about education had changed. Students themselves would look at these samples to see changes that had taken place.

As soon as we started to develop and use these activities, however, it became clear that it was unrealistic to view them as pre- and post-cycle assessment tools. Just doing the activities (eg. writing about the learning pictures) became an extended instructional unit in itself, sometimes taking weeks; the process of collecting appropriate readings took months and teachers wanted to use the collection as a teaching resource rather than limiting its use to assessment[2]. Further, the way each group of students responded to each activity was different: in some cases, students became very involved and in others they saw the activity as an interruption of what they were already doing. In short, our notion of a uniform set of activities to be used with all classess at the beginning and end of each cycle did not correspond to the reality of the teaching situations; the separation between assessment and instruction seemed artificial.

At the same time that we were trying to develop these formal assessment tools as a group, some interesting things were happening informally in the classrooms. Loren's students were writing dialogue journals and collecting other writings in portfolios; Andy developed a newsletter for reporting on ongoing classroom activities; Madeline was keeping her own journal with accounts of what was happening in her class with very beginning students; Charo's class began posted lists of their own learning accomplishments; at Ann's site, students were participating in group and individual evaluations of their own learning, their teachers and the program. At each site, students were publishing collections of writing, participating in community events, testifying at public hearings and providing other kinds of evidence of new ways of using literacy. Thus, each group was developing evaluation processes that emerged out of their own contexts. It became clear that rather than striving to find one uniform tool to fit all of our circumstances, what we needed was a range of context-specific, variable ways to assess different groups.

Thus, like others, we concluded that an alternative evaluation system "must be diverse enough to meet the needs of a variety of populations" (Berglund, 1989/90). To do this, such a system should include a set of guiding principles, a range of evaluation tools that teachers could select from as appropriate, and a process of ongoing documentation. The next pages will describe each of these.

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[2]It has since been published as Looking Forward, Looking Back: Writings from Many Worlds and is available for $3.00; see Resources for ordering information.

What characterizes alternative evaluation?

It's contextualized: Literacy is seen as a socio-cultural activity rather than a collection of discrete decontextualized skills; as such, assessment is situated in real-life contexts, in relation to particular tasks, strategies and purposes. It focuses on how students read/write particular kinds of texts in specific contexts and use what they've learned in their everyday lives (see Lytle 1988:4). The ability to use literacy to make changes and take action are valued over test results.

It's qualitative: It involves reflective description, attempting to capture the complexity and richness of literacy learning, rather than reducing it to numbers. It looks at metacognitive and affective factors including learners' conceptions of reading/writing and how they feel about changes in their lives.

It's process-oriented: Rather than focusing only on end-results, it is concerned with looking at how and why learners develop.

It's ongoing and integrated with instruction: Evaluation continues throughout instruction, "serving a variety of purposes including self-assessment, placement, program monitoring, materials selection, curriculum design, teaching" (Lytle 1988:4), rather than consisting only of formal pre- and post-testing. Teachers are an integral part of this process so that it can inform instruction. As Sauvé (1987:59) says, "on-going evaluation helps us to respond to current needs rather than those which have become no longer relevant."

It's supportive: It focuses on students' strengths rather than weaknesses - on what they <u>can</u> do not what they <u>can't</u> do. Choice is built in so that students can select texts they are able to read and tasks they want to participate in.

It's done *with*, not *to* students: Evaluation is done in students' interests rather than being driven by funders' needs. They are "active participants, co-investigators in determining and describing their own literacy practices, strengths and strategies" (Lytle 1988:3) so that they can shape their own learning and gain a measure of control over the process. They may participate in choosing or designing evaluation tools and evaluating themselves; results of assessment are shared with them. As they take on responsbility for documenting and reflecting on progress, the burden shifts off teachers; students become subjects rather than objects of evaluation.

It's two-way: Students participate in evaluating not only their own progress, but teacher and program dynamics as well. By evaluating each other, teachers and students take mutual responsibility; many perspectives are included in evaluation.

It's open-ended: It leaves room for and values the unexpected, instead of predetermining all acceptable outcomes. Unpredictable outcomes count and credit is given for achievements that might otherwise go unnoticed (Balliro 1989). "Rather than adhering strictly to a pre-determined script, learner-centered assessment

It's variable and context-specific: The particular forms that assessment takes can vary from group to group in accordance with the teaching context, learners' needs, goals and purposes.

A Tool Kit of Assessment Procedures[3]

Starting Up: The first group of assessment tools may be used as in-take or start-up activities to get a sense of students' strengths, interests, goals and needs coming into a program; they provide 'base-line data' about what students can already do with language and literacy, how they think about it and what they may want to do as a result of instruction. We integrated many of the following activities into instruction (rather than using them as one-on-one pre-instruction placement tools).

*Informal Interviews
*Language/Literacy Inventories
*Task-oriented Oral Language Assessment
*Reading Samples
*Writing Samples
*Goal-setting Activities

Along the Way: The second group are ongoing in-class activities to document learning as it takes place; they are integrated into instruction on a regular basis.

*Charts/Checklists
*Journals
*Group Journals
*Posted Journals
*Portfolios
*Class Accomplishments
*Anecdotes

Looking Back: The third are activities that involve reflecting on learning, teaching, curriculum and program design at the end of a cycle; they often involve the elicitation of both teachers' and students' perceptions.

*Peer Interviews
*Student-Teacher Conferences
*Review and repetition of earlier tasks
*Student Self-Evaluations
*Class Evaluations
*All Program Evaluations

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[3]One of the best available resources for assessment is The Kit: Self-evaluation Exercises for Students and Literacy Workers by Anna Hemmendinger, Toronto: East End Literacy 1988. It includes a wide range of tools which can be used with/by students and adapted for ESL. It is available from East End Literacy 265 Gerrard St. East, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5A 2G3.

Starting Up: Interviews and Inventories

Initial encounters with students should be genuine exchanges of information designed to set students at ease, gather information which is useful in curriculum development, give students a sense of the philosophy of the program, and respond to their questions/concerns. Their purpose should be not only to find out about students' oral language, but also to find out about their uses and views of language and literacy, their goals and their needs. There are a number of ways to do this: informal interviews using some of the questions that follow, in-depth language inventories, and task-based activities (like responding to a problem-posing code).

*Ascertain language proficiency holistically: general impressions about ability to understand questions, answer them with ease/difficulty, in minimal/elaborated ways, pronounciation, control of grammar, etc. should be noted after the interview. The interviewer should write as little as possible during the interview to set the student at ease.

*Use both languages: Since one purpose of the interview is to gather substantive information, a bilingual person should be present at the interview if possible and the first language should be used as needed; the interview should be conducted in English as far as possible to ascertain English proficiency and then change to the first language in order to find out about students' usage, views, interests and needs.

*Go with the flow: In order to be authentically communicative, it is important that the interviewer NOT stick rigidly to a format, but rather explore and follow-up on interesting issues as they arise.

*Be flexible about groupings: There is no reason to stick to a one-on-one format: small groups of students can be involved in in-take discussions/problem-posing tasks or even interviews of each other.

*Don't try to cover too much: In our experience, the first encounter may only touch on a few of the areas suggested here and others may become content for early class discussions or be integrated into instruction through catalyst activities. In particular, questions about usage can become student research activities; questions about schooling in the homeland can be the basis for in-class cultural comparison.

*Respect privacy and give students choice: Because students may be uncomfortable with certain questions, it is important to stress that they should feel free not to answer any question.

*Make communication two-way: the interviewer should share information about him/herself when appropriate to establish a communicative atmosphere; for example, if both the student and the interviewer have babies, they might talk about that.

Possible Interview Questions[4]

It is important not to bombard students with too many questions at the beginning; in addition to being intimidating, it may be difficult because of language constraints and doesn't always yield the information sought. These questions should be seen as guidelines to the type of information that is useful, but the information itself may be better generated through in-class activities like those described in Chapts.5 & 6.

Students' background

Where are you from?
What was your first language?
What other languages do you speak?
Do you have family here?
Do you have children? How many? Do you have pictures with you?
How old are they? What are their names? Are they with you in the U.S.?
Where do they go to school? What grades are they in? Are they in bilingual classes? How do you feel about that? Do you want to tell me about anyone else in your family?

[Here the interviewer might also want to share family pictures. By this point, he/she should already have a sense of the student's oral English proficiency.]

Employment

Did you work in your country? What kind of work did you do?
Do you work here?
[If no]: Do you want to work? What kind of work do you want to do?
[If yes]: What kind of work do you do? Do you like it? Do you want to get another kind of job? What kind of a job?
Do you do work that you're not paid for (church/commmunity/childcare)?

Education

Did you go to school in your country? For how long?
Do most people in your country go to school?
Did your parents go to school?
What are schools like in your country?
Have you gone to any other classes/schools in the U.S.?
Are you teaching anyone anything now(sewing/driving/sports)?
Are you teaching your children your first language? What else are you teaching them?
Why did you decide to come to English class now?
What kinds of things would you like to learn here?
What do you hope to do with better English? How do you think learning to read and write in English will change your life?
How do you think your family will feel as your English gets better?

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[4]Adapted from Lytle et al's (1986) in-take conference for ESL students.

Conceptions about literacy
Do most people know how to read and write in your country?
How is reading taught in your country?

Reading:
Do you like to read? Why/why not?
Do you read at home? What do you read? When do you read?
What language or languages do you read in?
What kinds of things do you read in your first language? in English?
Do you read at work? What kinds of things do you read?
Is it easy or hard for you to read in your first language? in English?
Do you think you are a good reader? Why/why not?
What is the hardest thing about learning to read in English for you?
Do you know anyone who is a good reader? What makes him/her a good reader? (Simpler wording: Who is a good reader? Why?)

Writing:
Do you like to write? Why/why not?
Do you write at home? What do you write? When do you write?
What language or languages do you write in?
What kinds of things do you write in each language?
Do you think you are a good writer? Why/why not?
What is the hardest thing about learning to write for you?
Do you know someone who is a good writer? What makes him/her a good writer? What does he/she do?

Support systems:
What do you do when you have trouble reading/writing something?
Does anyone help you? Who?
Do you help anyone with reading and writing? Who?
Do your children get homework? Do they show it to you? Do they ask you to help them with it? Do you have to sign it? Do you help them in other ways? How?
Do you think it's important for people to read and write in both their first language and in English?
Do you want to work on your first language reading and writing?
Do you want your kids to learn to read/write in your first language?

Needs:
What do you need English for? How do you want to use it?
What do you want to do with it?

__work
__helping my kids
__shopping
__going to the bank
__getting more education
__driver's license
__talking with friends, neighbors
__housing
__immigration
__reading/writing poems/literature
__other

Inventory of Uses of Language/Literacy

Students can participate in open-ended research about language and literacy use in their lives, doing tasks like listing all the things they read or write in one day, or listing all the kinds of written materials in each language in their house; alternatively, questionnaires like this one can be used to guide student research.

What do you already know how to read/use in English? What do you want to do?

	Already know	Want to learn
__phone book		
__bills		
__labels on medicine bottles		
__letters from friends		
__newspaper		
__menus		
__poetry		
__dictionary		
__Help Wanted Ads		
__Ads for housing		
__Bible		
__children's books		
__movie schedules		
__material for work		
__directions for using things		
__notes and notices from school		
__stories		
__other		

What do you already know how to write in English? Want to learn?

	Already know	Want to learn
__letters		
__notes to school		
__diary		
__poetry, stories		
__homework		
__filling out forms		
__checks		
__things for work		
__other		

What kinds of written material are there in your house?

__children's books
__dictionaries
__magazines/comics
__newspapers
__notes from school
__letters
__TV guides
__cook books, home repair guides
__ literature: novels, poetry
__official papers
__religious books
__other

Family Literacy Interactions

What are some of the ways you support your children's education?

__teach them something you're good at (songs, sports, cooking, etc.)
__teach them your first language
__tell them about your homeland
__tell them stories from your homeland
__look at books and talk about books with them
__listen to them read
__read with them
__read to them
__talk to them about what they're doing
__talk to them about school and their homework
__sit with them while they do their homework
__look at their homework when it's done
__help them do their homework
__ask them for help with your homework
__do your homework while they do theirs
__give them a quiet time and place to do homework
__visit their classroom
__go to school meetings
__talk to other parents about school
__talk to the teacher when you think there's a problem
__work with other parents/groups to make changes in the school
__write notes to the teacher
__read notes or bulletins from the school
__ask someone to translate or tell you what school notices say
__respond to teachers' notes
__read report cards
__go to conferences with the teacher
__take the children to the bus
__take the children to the library
__take them to cultural events (music groups from your country, festivals)
__take them to museums, plays or movies
__write stories or poems with them
__teach them numbers, letters, songs
__play games with them
__other

Which of these do you think are most important? Least important? Why?
Which would you like to try (that you don't already do)?

Reading and Writing Samples

This sequence is adapted from Lytle et al (1986) and formats used in our program.

Quick check: This is to get a preliminary sense of basics. It might include a simple application form (name, address, phone number, hours available for English class, etc.). The interviewer can help if the student has trouble. The interviewer can go on to check contextualized sight words (in photos of signs or labels), judging whether to continue with the writing samples based on this.

Reading selection: A range of authentic materials in L1 and English can be spread out on the table (eg. newspaper, magazine, children's book, driver's manual, comic, greeting card, photonovella, poem, brochure, report card, announcement about classes). Students should be asked if they would like to read any of these or parts of them; after reading and talking about them, they should be asked which other ones (or what else) they would like to work on in class.

Writing selection: The student should be asked to choose one writing task from a range: making a quick grocery list, writing a note telling a child's teacher that she is sick, taking a phone message, filling out a check or application for housing, writing a postcard to a friend.

Reading whole texts: Students should be shown a packet of short texts on a variety of themes including some written by other literacy students; the interviewer may have a few packets at different levels, showing only the one deemed appropriate for that student. The texts should be semantically whole, with content related to students' lives. Students should be asked which text they want to read and asked how they want to read it (silently/aloud; together/alone; listen only). Retelling and discussion can be either in L1 or L2. Questions might include: Why did you pick this story? What was it about? Did it remind you of anything in your own life? Do you have any questions about it? Was there anything special you liked/didn't like about it? Teachers can note which text students choose, and how they read and responded to it (literal comprehension, inference, reacting to ideas, relating to personal experience, evaluating).

Writing whole texts: Students should be given a catalyst for writing their own stories; it might be the texts they have just read or a picture (like the learning pictures described on page 97 or a photo they have). Again, they can be given a choice of writing in L1 or L2.

In-Class Goal-setting Activities

Early classes can focus on tasks designed to elicit student conceptions about language learning, student-teacher roles and goals. Many of the activities described in Chapter 5 (Ways In) can be used in this way. In addition, "The English Class" (Unit I, Lesson 3 of ESL for Action by Auerbach and Wallerstein) includes activities to generate discussion about reasons for studying English, attitudes toward language learning and a model for ongoing evaluation of each lesson. The following account by Andy Nash (excerpted from All Write News, VI:3, Nov./Dec. 1989), describes an in-class sequence that took on an evaluation function:

...When I began this 'lesson', I was not thinking about evaluation. I had planned an activity that, more generally, would help us think and talk about student/teacher roles. It was near the beginning of the cycle and my plan was to look at the educational experiences we had had in our lives and then reflect on the ways we did or didn't want to recreate those in our current classroom. My explicit aim was to reconsider student/teacher roles and the patterns of authority that we carry with us from our childhood classrooms.

We started by looking at a variety of pictures of people learning something. Some of the people were in school, some in other settings; some happy, some miserable; some young, some old. We described the pictures first and then talked about the memories they evoked. We read excerpts from writings other students had done about their educational experiences and wrote our own.

In the next class, those who wished to, read their pieces aloud and this stirred further conversation. Taken all together, we had a large number of experiences from which to generalize. But I wasn't quite sure where to go with it next. In the past, I had asked people to write about an imaginary ideal class, but this had failed for many reasons (it's difficult to imagine on demand, fear of challenging the teacher's model, etc.). I decided, quite spontaneously, to divide the class into groups and asked them to make two lists: one to complete the phrase, "It's easy to learn when..." and the other to finish "It's hard to learn when..." When they were done, volunteers copied their group's contributions onto newsprint. Here are some of their responses:

It's easy to learn when..	It's hard to learn when...
*we have a good teacher	*the teacher pushes you
*the teacher is a good person	*people laugh at you
*we forget our problems	*we don't understand
*we pay attention	*we have many problems
*the class is friendly	*we don't have time

I was pleased with the activity. Because I had asked about learning in general and not about individual experiences, people spoke of socio-economic as well as emotional and personal barriers to learning. They put learning in a social context that reminded us that the lives people lead outside the classroom affect what happens inside the classroom. When we talked about their responses it was clear that they wanted the pressure of their daily lives taken into account and that their "performance" in class could not be separated from those concerns.

It occurred to me that we could try to set some class goals that would respond to their needs and then use them as criteria for evaluating the class. Everyone seemed to like this idea, so I suggested that we write our goals as resolutions and used the opportunity to teach the use of the future tenses "will" to make promises. We divided the lists up as follows and then tried to come up with concrete responses to the listed items.

Teacher Resolutions	Student Resolutions
*I will try to be a good teacher	*We will try to pay attention
*I will try to be a good person	*We will try to forget our problems
*I won't pressure you to learn but I will pressure you to try to learn.	*We will ask questions if we don't understand
	*We will try to make time

Whole Group Resolutions

*We will try to make the class friendly and interesting
*We won't laugh at people
*We will learn things in class that will help us solve our problems

As I look back I see that it would have been better to more clearly define the goals...but in a certain way the specific goals don't matter. What's important is that students had explored their own learning needs and set their own objectives that are as important as narrower linguistic goals. Clearly, this list did not exhaust the goals that each of us had for ouselves or the group. But this first attempt to build a student-defined evaluation helped us broaden our notions of what should be evaluated, by whom, and why. We returned to it periodically throughout the cycle to assess our personal and group progress and, finding some aims too general to evaluate, the students decided to make more precise objectives next cycle. Our teacher/student roles had already shifted.

Along the Way: On-going Assessment Tools

One of the most important ways to develop student participation in curriculum development and evaluation is by structuring in ritualized procedures, built in on a regular daily, weekly or monthly basis, for collecting and reflecting on student work. These activities give participants immediate feedback about the effectiveness of learning/teaching, allowing adjustments to be made along the way; in addition, they provide a basis for reviewing progress at the end of the cycle.

Action Evaluations: Once students have addressed a problem through individual or group action (like testifying at a funding hearing, dealing with issues of family or classroom dynamics, participating in a parent's group meeting or attending a school function), they can reflect on what happened with dialogue questions like: *What happened? How did you feel about it? Why did it happen this way? What might you do differently next time? What new problems have arisen as a result of this action?*

Charts/Checklists: Students can make charts reflecting what they can and can't do, what they do and don't like, what they want and don't want to learn. These can be done on an individual or group basis, daily, weekly or monthly. Hemmendinger's self evaluation kit (1988) and Nunan (1988) include a range of checklist formats which can be adapted for particular groups or students. The following questions are adapted from a format suggested by Nunan (1988:134):

This week I studied:

This week I learned:

This week I liked:

This week I didn't like:

This week I used my English in these places:

This week I spoke with these people:

This week I had difficulties with:

I would like to know/work on:

My learning and practicing plans for next week are:

Individual Student Journals: Journals can be used for assessment in a number of ways. Balliro (1989) suggests building in 15 minutes at the end of each class in which the teacher and students each write journal entries. Students can reflect on their own learning, assess their progress using English and report on accomplishments, writing about reactions to classroom experiences, interactions using English outside of class, family interactions, or anything else that is on their minds. As they develop, journals provide concrete evidence of students' progress. Teachers can evaluate them in terms of criteria like range of topics/content, elaboration of ideas (including use of details, examples, depth of analysis, emotional force, etc.), length of entries, grammatical development (specific forms like tense markers, fragments, etc.) and coherence as well as students' own perspective on their learning. Students can use them for self-evaluation by reading and responding to the finished products, noting changes and areas needing work.

The Group Journal: Sauvé (1987:58) describes a group process whereby everyone contributes reflections at the end of each class in response to questions like, "What happened today? What did we do today? What did we learn today?" This provides a sense of the differing perspectives in the group, forces the group to name what they have done, and encourages collective responsibility for what happens. It can be done as an LEA activity; journals can be collected as a class history.

The Posted Journal: Charo's class used an evaluation procedure which involved posting a sheet of newsprint in class with the word 'Accomplishments' at the top and two columns, one called 'In Class' and the other called 'Out of Class'. Whenever anyone had something to report that they felt good about, they wrote it on the list.

Class Newsletters: Andy developed a class newsletter in which she summarized the activities of the week as a vehicle for reflecting on learning and discussing accomplishments. She included points covered in the lessons (grammar, readings, etc.), reports on class discussions, attendance, and accounts of individual students' problems or achievements. The newsletter served a number of functions, from reviewing lesson content, to becoming a reading text, to catalyzing action about class issues (like attendance), to documenting the progress of the class and becoming an evaluation tool. (See "Our Class" Talking Shop).

Portfolios: Student writing can be collected in individual portfolios which include everything from informal free-writing assignments to all the drafts of each piece from the beginning to the end of the cycle. These become records of development which both teachers and students evaluate periodically or at the end of the cycle. Students then see concrete representations of their own growth and they can be asked to comment on changes they note. Teachers can look for development of spelling, grammar, coherence, organization, elaboration of ideas, etc.

Anecdotes

The East End Literacy Assessment Kit (1988) identifies anecdotes as an important tool for legitimating the many ways that literacy changes students' lives. It defines an anecdote as "an account of someone, describing what you noticed about the student in the beginning and how the student has changed since then" (1988:128). These stories describe changes which don't show up in direct, paper and pencil assessment procedures including affective changes in self-confidence, openness, group participation, ability to make a living, etc. In a participatory approach, they go beyond personal changes to include the ability to use literacy to address social problems, work with others to make changes in family and community life.

Anecdotes serve two functions: first, they provide valuable feedback to the learner; as such, they should be written with the learner in mind, using language that is accessible and content that can be shared. Second, they are a means of reporting changes to others in a systematic format. To accomplish these goals, Hemmendinger suggests that anecdotes have two components, one that is descriptive and another that is analytical. The former tells the story of the incident indicating change, comparing the student before and after. The latter entails labeling or categorizing changes to provide a schema for documenting them. Hemmindinger describes in detail how to identify, keep track of and summarize changes. She suggests a format in which the description is written on the right hand side of the page with corresponding categories of changes listed alongside them in the left margin. Categories of change can be summarized at the end of a collection of anecdotes with short phrases providing examples of each category.

The content of categories - deciding what counts as change - will vary depending on program objectives. Categories listed on the following pages are adapted and expanded from Hemmindinger (1988), Isserlis and Filipek (1988), and Balliro (1989). The same factors used to analyze anecdotes can be applied in categorizing information yielded by other assessment tools (interviews, reading/writing samples, student journals, group journals, class accomplishments, etc.). The checklist format presented here is one way to capture changes graphically; the particular categories of change included here are by no means exhaustive; they should be seen as examples of possible markers of change. Categories should vary according to program and student goals. Each checklist should be specific to the learning context in which it is used!

Progress Checklist

Name _____

	Before cycle	During cycle.	End of cycle
Personal, affective changes:			
feeling safe, feeling at ease			
willingness to take risks			
longer attention span			
ability to identify personal learning goals			
ability to address personal problems			
other _____			
Social changes in the classroom/among peers:			
increased self-direction of learning			
increased participation			
self-monitoring of participation			
ability to help and support peers			
ability to express opinion or disagree			
ability to take on new roles (leadership)			
ability to reflect on classroom dynamics			
other _____			
Social changes outside the classroom:			
participation in community activities, organizations			
increased responsibility			
social networking			
using community resources			
assisting, supporting peers			
other _____			
Changes in relation to children's schooling:			
more support at home			
more contact with school			
advocacy on children's behalf			
participation in parent groups			
other _____			
Changes in Writing			
mechanics (letter formation, spelling, etc.)			
length of written pieces			
ability to generate ideas			
abilty to draft and revise			
elaboration of ideas			
organization			
ability to write about personal experience			
ability to write analytically			
other _____			

Changes in Reading
- predicting
- using prior knowledge
- skimming, previewing
- using context
- guessing
- sound/letter/word identification
- awareness of strategies
- ability to relate reading to personal experience
- critical reading
- other _____

Changes in Oral Language Use
- comprehension
- ability to ask for clarification
- clarity of pronounciation
- immediacy of response
- length of utterances
- taking the initiative
- taking risks
- ability to express opinions
- ability to question/challenge
- other _____

Metacognitive Changes
- awareness of progress/goals
- awareness of reading/writing processes
- ability to monitor and choose strategies
- ability to ask for assistance
- ability to make choices about language use
- other _____

Changes in Uses of Literacy
- functional uses in specific contexts
    - consumer choice
    - employment
    - housing
    - banking/money
    - health care
- using literacy for personal expression
- using literacy in family interactions
- using literacy for learning
- using literacy for advocacy
- increased independence in literacy use
- using literacy to understand social context
- using literacy to question and challenge
- other _____

Looking Back

The following activities for the end of the cycle invite students and teachers to reflect on what they have and haven't accomplished; again students should have the option of doing these in either English or their first language.

Peer Interviews: Students can interview each other using questions they have generated collectively. These may be framed in terms of initial goals or more general questions like "What are the most important things you learned in this class? What can you do now that you couldn't do before? What changes have you made since you began this class? What did you like most about this class? What should be changed about the class?" Students can report each others' answers to the whole group and compare impressions.

Student-Teacher Conferences: Students and teachers can use the same questions they started with at in-take, comparing before and after responses and/or using questions like those listed on p. 216-217.

Review and repetition of earlier tasks: Students can review their portfolios, journals and coursework to see changes; they can repeat reading and writing sample tasks and compare results. Students can do this evaluation individually, with peers or with the teacher.

Student Self-Evaluations: Students can use chart, checklist or narrative writing formats to evaluate their own learning. If they used checklists to identify goals, interests and needs at the beginning of the cycle, they can come back to these and determine whether their goals have been met and what they still need to work on. Again, see Nunan (1988: 131-134).

Class Evaluations: Students can be invited to provide feedback about the class either during or at the end of a cycle. Because students are often reluctant to express negative feelings or criticism, questions should be impersonal; students can be asked to write anonymous evaluations or work in groups so that no individual's ideas are identified; in addition, it helps to have specific questions about what participants disliked or would change. Ann used questions like "How do you usually feel in class? Is the class too easy or difficult for you? What could improve the class?" for a beginning class; at a higher level, she asked, "What kind of atmosphere did you expect to find in classes before you came? What did you find that you didn't expect to find? What didn't you find that you expected to find? In what situations did you use what you learned in the class? What were the games you learned the most from?"

Program Evaluation: Students from various classes can come together to discuss programmatic issues like class structure, content, use of the native language, childcare, scheduling, class size, groupings, and funding concerns. Ann Cason details the processes and benefits of this kind of evaluation in Talking Shop ("All-Program Evaluations").

Teacher Research: Ongoing Documentation Procedures

The cornerstone of qualitative evaluation is documenting what is happening in the classroom as it happens. As Johnston (in press:20) says, "Central to this approach is the teacher's ability to know the students, and to notice and record their development in a variety of areas...The ability to set the conditions for and to notice patterns of activity and changes in those patterns is at the heart of the teacher's evaluative skill." This kind of evaluation provides the context within which to understand students' progress, the basis for curriculum decision-making and a record of changes which can become data for further analysis. Thus, teachers become researchers of their own classrooms.

Both the process and the product of documenting curriculum development serve important functions. Since documentation is done in open-ended, descriptive way, collecting and recording data without predetermining what to look for (as in ethnographic research), the process itself becomes a vehicle for listening to and valuing the unexpected. It enables the teacher to stand back from the immediate moment and reflect on it, which, in turn, may lead to new insights about patterns and issues. Just by writing or talking about what is happening in their classes, teachers gain new understandings of why it is happening and what to do next.

Very often, however, insights about what is happening don't come until much later: it may not be clear how to use information as it is being gathered. Thus, the on-going accounts can serve a retroactive function, becoming 'data' for future reflection; they provide invaluable information as recorded histories of class cycles, student progress, and teacher thinking. Teachers in our project, for example, collected teaching materials, student writings, notes and journal-like descriptions of particular teaching cycles; while they were in the middle of the cycles, they had one perspective on them, but when they wrote about them later, their perspectives changed: "putting our experiences down on paper, we have been forced to reflect on them as we may not have previously done. In this way, we've learned not only from each others' writings but from our own as well" (Talking Shop, 1989:3). Likewise, it was the cumulative, detailed documentation of day to day activities, discussions, and student work that provided the data for the analysis which has emerged in writing this curriculum guide. There are many forms of documentation ranging from very structured and schematic to open-ended and flexible. Some that we have used are described on the next pages.

Retroactive lesson plans

A uniform format for keeping track of specific classroom activities and student reactions to them can be used on a daily/weekly basis. The schema for documentation presented below is one possibility, showing where themes came from (catalysts), how they were developed (tools/activities), how language work was incorporated, what new issues emerged and teacher's reflections. We started using this in our project, but teachers felt it was artificial and constraining; the schematic form inhibited rich description. Others might find it useful, particularly in the process of moving from a traditional to a participatory approach.

FAMILY LITERACY PROJECT SCHEMA FOR DOCUMENTING CLASS ACTIVITIES

CATALYST	PARTICIPATORY ACTIVITIES	GRAMMAR FOCUS	ISSUES GENERATED	COMMENTS

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Teachers' journals

Teachers in our project felt that journals were a more organic way of documenting day to day classroom interactions. Several of them kept daily journals in which they described activities, student reactions, issues or concerns that arose for them, their own reactions or reflections about the interactions, and ideas for future lessons. Journal entries, taken together, become a kind of history of the development of the curriculum as well as a record of particular events. The following is an example from Madeline's journal.

We returned to the lesson from "Language and culture in Conflict", 'What is culture?'. There was a lot of discussion about kids' needs to play and not wanting to help out with household responsibilities no matter what country they're from. I tried to direct the discussion towards seeing the conflicts that may arise from the specific situation like the one in the picture where the mother speaks one language (and presumably comes from a different country) and the child who responds in English and who may or may not speak the mother's language. There was some frustration voiced on the part of Nigisti, Deloudes and Maria with respect to situations like the one from the book. Maria said her youngest child, she's 14, can't participate in family discussions after dinner. She said they sit together and speak Creole (she's from Cape Verde) and her doughter sits and stares. She tells her daughter to try to speak the language but her daughter is shy. There was a distinctly harsh tone in her voice which indicated her disapproval of her daughter's temerity. Nigisti talked about her sons being unable to speak with their grandmother when she called from Ethiopia last year. At other times she has told me that Joseph, her older son, doesn't like it when she speaks to him in Tigray in public. He feels embarassed about being different. She said maybe when they grow up they will go to Eritrea and then they will learn to speak the language of their parents' country. Deloudes says that sometimes she talks to her kids in Creole and they respond in English. However she didn't express any dissatisfaction with this at that time.

Tape recording

Taping classroom interactions can provide raw data for future analysis. Cathie Wallace, a British reading researcher who worked with our project for several months, said that she regularly taped her interactions with students; at the time that she started the taping, she wasn't looking for anything specific. Later, she went back and listened to the tapes, without having formulated research questions or hypotheses in mind, but rather, to see what was interesting and what vignettes seemed to reveal reader/teacher strategies. She said that the value of the taping was that it gave her a chance to listen to herself and see how her comments as a teacher shaped the way students read; in addition, it enabled her to see the positive strategies that 'problem' readers used. The tapes later became the basis for research on second langauage reading.[5].

Madeline used tape recording for the purpose of monitoring small group discussions (to get a sense of how one group was doing while she was working with another); listening to the tapes revealed both interesting student issues and areas for language work. Madeline decided to share the tapes with the whole class, representing the issues in the form of transcriptions of the tapes. Thus, students could themselves reflect on the interactions, exploring both the content and linguistic aspects together. In this way, the documentation fed into instruction and students were involved in the analysis.

Tapes served a third function in our curriculum development process. They provided a basis for comparing student reactions to materials and activities. Since children's homework was an issue for most classes, they developed a homework code (see p.132) to be used with several classes. Andy taped each class on the day it was used and transcribed the tapes as a basis for teachers to analyze and compare responses and reasons for them. As we said in Chapter 5, each group reacted differently depending on the way the lesson was introduced and who the students were, projecting its own interpretations and analyses onto the code. Follow-up and new issues varied from class to class. The transcription enabled teachers to see concretely how the context of students' lives and of the lesson shapes responses.

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[5]Wallace, Catherine. Learning to Read in a Multicultural Society: The Social Context of Second Language Literacy. New York: Prentice Hall, 1988.

Monthly reports

Summaries of the month's activities provide an overviewof activities, accomplishments and issues for groups. The process of writing these reports can be a framework for reflection, a time for teachers to stop and think about what they've done and where they're going. The reports can also provide a place to communicate problems, needs and concerns to program administration. Depending on the point in program development, these might address questions like the following:

Recruitment: How was it done? Did you prepare flyers or other materials? What kinds of outreach did you do? What are possible untapped resources for outreach?

In-take: Give a brief description of how this was done. What issues did it raise for your? What ideas did you get for curriculum development? What was interesting/frustrating about it? How might you change it?

Students: What have you learned about your students in terms of:
first language literacy, prior schooling?
family situations (family members here/in homeland, number of children, schools, ages, grades, special interests, needs)
community issues/concerns
ESL/literacy usage
years in the U.S.
work life, history

Classroom Activities: What kinds of activities have you done? What motivated them? Where did the themes come from? Which were most successful? Which were less successful? What new student issues did they raise? What issues/concerns did they raise for you about classroom dynamics?

Critical Incidents/Anecdotes: What interesting/unexpected/frustrating or otherwise noteable incidents arose in class/with students?

New Insights/Issues: What do you feel you've learned from/about your students? What do you fell you've learned about your own teaching? What new issues/problems/concerns have arisen? What strikes you write this report about your work of the past month?

Please include examples of activities, materials, student work, your journals, retroactive lesson plans, etc.

Minutes of meetings

There are several limitations to these forms of documentation done by individual teachers: first, they take more time than many teachers have; second, while each may reflect what's happening in particular classes, separately they may be fragmented and fall short of reflecting the broader picture for a project; and third, because by nature they are the result of an indvidual process, they preclude the kind of insight that comes from collective analysis. Thus, the dialogue that takes place in teacher meetings and the recording of that dialogue through minutes are central to the curriculum development and evaluation process. The meetings provide a framework for the development of a "community of knowledgeable peers" (Balliro 1989) and a context for the program-based practitioner research called for by Lytle (1988). The minutes provide a detailed, sequential documentation of what transpires in this process; they become the thread that ties together individual accounts. Our minutes included accounts of:

*discussions on classroom issues (like attendance, use of the L1 in class, dealing with students' personal problems)

*planning for curriculum units (on topics like homework, the immigration law which we had identified as student concerns)

*teacher sharing (classroom activities and feedback about them from other teachers).

*discussion of community events and issues (school closings, Hispanic parents' advocacy group, which may be linked to curriculum development)

*training sessions (on process writing, photo-novellas, oral histories)

*project business (workload, scheduling, administration)

*professional development (reflections on conferences we had attended and their implications for our work)

*planning for dissemination: conference presentations, articles, etc.

*discussions of intragroup dynamics (within our project staff)

*planning for community events, actions (literacy fairs, testifying at hearings, etc.)

Putting it Together

Although the system of evaluation proposed here isn't neatly packaged into a ready-made sequence, we hope it will be useful as programs construct their own evaluation schemes. Specifically, we hope that 1) its rationale and principles can help to challenge demands for standardized testing and to justify qualitative approaches to evaluation; 2) the "toolkit" can be a resource as programs select and adapt tools for their own contexts; and 3) the documentation processes will help teachers gather information which is useful for their own curriculum development as well as reporting to others (administrators and funders).

Most importantly, however, the results of this kind of evaluation will help to develop the field of adult education. In a sense, this curriculum guide as a whole is an evaluation of our project: as a retroactive account of what we did, how we did it, what the results were, what we learned and could generalize from it, it reflects the kind of process described in this chapter. As more and more practitioners document, analyze and share what they're doing, our collective understanding of what does and doesn't work will grow. Research which comes from inside the classroom will be the basis for constructing and extending our knowledge about adult learning.

CONCLUSION: Looking Back, Looking Ahead

From the body of data gathered following the processes outlined in Chapter 8, we were able to make a number of generalizations about adult ESL teaching and learning which have implications for the field as a whole. Specifically, findings from this research suggest that:

**When the content of ESL literacy instruction is related to students' lives, both the quantity and quality of their reading and writing increase significantly.* In some cases, student writing doubled when the focus shifted from decontextualized skills and grammar work to social-contextual issues (daycare, immigration, etc.). Even the lowest level students were capable of sophisticated conceptual analysis when literacy work centered on meaning rather than form. Thus, a bottom-up view of literacy acquisition which limits beginning students to decoding, decontextualized grammar work and functional language use may impede language and literacy development.

**If reading, writing, speaking and grammar are integrated, rather than being separated as isolated skills, students are able to perform conceptually and linguistically more sophisticated tasks.* When instruction was organized around content rather than skills, students were able to develop ideas through a variety of modes (conversation, reading and writing), resulting in richer, more meaningful language use. When grammar was taught in isolation, students often had difficulty internalizing rules and transferring them to other contexts. Thus, when grammar instruction is embedded in content-based, meaning-making tasks, it seems to be easier for students monitor, internalize and transfer appropriate usage.

Interest and engagement are greater when students are involved in determining the content of the curriculum. Our students were often more responsive to themes which they had identified than to those introduced by the teacher; in some cases, they responded better to texts they had written themselves than to texts with similar content written by someone else. Even for teacher-identified issues, students were more engaged if they had a choice about whether to pursue it.

Students are interested in broad range of issues and literacy uses beyond functional or survival topics. The diversity of topics which emerged in our project indicates that adult ESL students want more than a narrow 'life skills' focus. In particular, it shows that bilingual parents may want to address a variety of concerns and literacy uses in addition to those related directly to their children's schooling.

The quality of students' reading and writing increases when they are presented as social rather than individual processes. When students worked together, they were often able to read and write longer, more conceptually complex and linguistically sophisticated pieces. Through the group process they were able to use literacy to make changes outside the classroom. This finding suggests that peer learning serves an important function in literacy acquisition and raises questions about programs based solely on one-to-one tutoring.

Attendance, retention and students' responsibility for their own learning increase when they are involved in decision-making. When teachers brought issues of classroom dynamics, curriculum choices and evaluation to students (as content for literacy work), there were significant changes in their attitudes and participation. They were able to monitor and change personal and group learning patterns.

Use of the first language can be a powerful tool for second language, literacy and conceptual development. In contrast to the prevalent view that ESL acquisition is facilitated by using English only, our work suggests that selective use of the L2 can be beneficial. By providing L1 literacy instruction, we were able to reach a population of students who had previously been excluded. Further, by giving ESL students choices about language use, both the conceptual level of their literacy work and the quality of what they produced in English was enhanced. Thus, for many students, using the first language as a bridge facilitates the acquisition of English. Finally, when students are involved in reflecting on and making language choices, they become monitors of their own language use.

What made it possible?

Looking back at our own experience, we identified three key factors which made it possible for students to achieve as much as they did and for teachers to make the innovations and reach the conclusions presented in this Guide. First was the atmosphere of inquiry and experimentation which permeated the project: rather than starting with givens, we approached our work openly, constantly trying new things and analyzing what did or didn't work with our students. No one defined from the outside what teachers should be doing; instead teachers had the leeway to investigate content, methods, tools, and activities with students.

Second was the structure for teacher-sharing. Instituting a regular, legitimated time and place for raising concerns, getting feedback and reflecting collectively on what was happening in classrooms served a number of functions. As a form of staff development, it allowed for cross-fertilization between classes, with teachers learning from each other, taking ideas from one context and applying them in another. Teachers became their own best resources in generating curriculum material. Teacher-sharing also provided a support system for teachers: by sharing doubts, problems and successes, they were able to energize each other and combat the isolation which teachers so often feel. Most importantly from a research perspective, teacher-sharing provided a way to generalize from individual experience; as teachers examined and compared findings from one context to another, they gained a broader perspective on their own practice, identified patterns and moved toward generalizations.

Third was the fact that we applied to our work as a group the same participatory principles that we used in our teaching. Just as teacher-student roles get redefined in a participatory classroom, we gradually moved toward equalizing our roles within the project staff. We tried to make decisions together, identify topics for training together, and construct our collective knowledge together. We shifted toward sharing responsibility for dissemination and conference presentations. Several of our publications were the result of attempts at participatory production. While this process was uneven and we may not have ever reached our goal of becoming fully participatory, the fact that we had this goal enabled participants to voice their concerns and see struggles for an equalization of roles as legitimate. It gave us a standard against which to measure our practice as a group and ensured that there was a forum for talking about issues of participation and decision-making.

Implications for the future

While the approach we have outlined in this guide is a powerful one, it clearly requires a great deal of time and energy. For teachers the biggest concern is often that it sounds like too much work! In reading this guide, you may very well feel overwhelmed and wonder where to start or how to deal with administrators who don't share the perspectives presented here. These are realistic concerns which shouldn't be minimized; the following suggestions may help in addressing them.

First, rather than throwing out everything you're comfortable with and seeing this approach as a complete change from past practice, it may make more sense to begin by building bridges between what you're already doing and what's new to you. Teachers, just like students, need to mix the old with the new. Chapter 2 presented an example of a lesson in which students were asked to respond to a school flyer listing ways that they should help their children with homework. In that lesson, Loren asked the students to look at the flyer critically, addressing questions like:

> Which of these things do you already do?
> Which of these things would you like to do?
> Which do you think are ridiculous, unrealistic or impossible?
> What do you already do that's not listed here?

You might want to ask the same questions about this guide, starting by examining your existing practice: ask yourself what you are already doing that works well, (identifying what seems to get the most/least student response), and figure out why. Further you can find commonalities between the two approaches: examine what you are already doing that is similar to something you read about in this guide and try to build on that. Then you can begin experimenting with new ideas on a limited basis: you might do nothing but record issues that you identify through conscious listening, building a core of topics for future exploration; or you might experiment with finding themes using the methods described in Chapter 5. Or you might choose one theme that is obviously "hot" and develop a curriculum unit around it (including a code and/or other tools described in Chapter 6). The point is to start small, making the transition to a new approach gradually. In this process, it may be helpful to keep a journal in which you record issues as they come up, write observations, and evaluate the new things you try.

Second, you can begin establishing a support network. Since the teacher's role is one of posing rather than solving problems, you don't have to do everything alone: your students and your colleagues are partners in the process. This means working with students to figure out themes, activities and directions. Once you share this process with them and stop feeling that you have to be the source of all knowledge and direction, the burden is lightened. Teachers often say that when they realize that they don't have to be the authority in the classroom who solves every problem and has answers to every question, they feel relieved. Your co-workers are an invaluable resource: teachers can exchange ideas for catalysts, materials, exercises and ways of dealing with students' issues or class dynamics.

Third, it is helpful to know that the process of finding themes and using tools becomes routine in a relatively short time. Issues begin to spring up everywhere once you're tuned in to them. As you develop a core collection of authentic texts and sources of photographs like those listed in Resources, it's not hard to find relevant materials. But most importantly, once you become familiar with a few basic processes (linking reading to students' experiences, developing codes, guiding dialogue, writing collaboratively, going through the stages of the writing process, developing class newsletters, etc.), responding to issues as they arise becomes second nature. The key is having the conceptual framework - the understanding that content must come from and go back to students' lives.

Finally, once this process begins, it starts to have its own pay-off: it's no longer necessary to ignore the diversions, or feel guilty for digressing into unplanned discussions. The quality and content of student responses is often more rich and varied than they are in a grammar or competency-driven curriculum. And most of all, it's fun. The level of sharing and communication becomes a reward in itself.

It is also certainly true that teachers need the support and cooperation of funders and program administrators to implement a participatory approach. The effectiveness of this approach will be curtailed if teachers constantly feel constrained by external demands based on conflicting assumptions. Funders and program administrators play a critical role in creating the conditions necessary for an effective program. It is important for them to give teachers the time and flexibility to develop curricula specific to the needs of their students. Specific structural guidelines for doing this are presented in the Practitioners' Bill of Rights (Chapter 3). Central among these is providing paid time for teacher sharing,

planning and staff development; further, evaluation procedures which reflect language and literacy usage both inside and outside the classroom must be developed and adopted. In addition, it is critical to treat teachers as knowledgeable professionals by giving them both the autonomy and the support (in terms of resources) needed to develop appropriate curricula.

Finally, it is important for funders, administrators and practioners to work together to educate legislators about adult literacy and to advocate for the kind of programming described here. As long as literacy is seen narrowly in terms of employment-related outcomes, and legislation focuses on job-preparedness, certain segments of the student population will be excluded and others may be dead-ended in entry-level jobs.

Digging with a teaspoon... or putting it all in perspective

At one point in our project, Andy made the comment that sometimes it feels like we're digging with a teaspoon in the desert. Change happens slowly and our efforts may seem small in relation to the enormity of the issues facing students. Further, administrators want to see fast results and often blame the teachers or the approach if changes aren't immediate or visible enough. There seems to be an expectation that if only we, as adult educators, find the right approach or are effective enough inside the classroom, students will make dramatic leaps in proficiency with consequences for all the other social and economic problems they face.

It is important for both teachers and administrators to remember that language, literacy and adult education are pieces of a bigger picture. We started this guide with the analysis that family literacy is shaped by many factors - by whether families have an adequate place to live, adequate jobs and health care. For many of our students, the pressures of immigration, poor housing conditions, health problems, employment concerns (unemployment, low wages, having to work several jobs, substandard working conditions, etc.) are the central realities of daily life. It is an illusion to think that literacy is a magic bullet which will solve these problems. No matter how well classes are taught, unless the basic inequities in the socio-economic conditions of students' lives outside the classroom are also addressed, what happens inside the classroom will be of minor significance. It is unrealistic to expect that by addressing one one piece of this picture, the others will be resolved. Blaming ineffective educational methods for problems whose source lies elsewhere becomes a kind of scapegoating. By the same token, it is unrealistic

to think that literacy work, no matter how participatory, will in itself lead to social transformation. Although Freire-inspired literacy campaigns have often been accompanied by deep-seated social changes, their power may have come from the fact that these changes were already taking place.

Clearly, this is not to say that what happens in the classroom doesn't matter. The approach to literacy can either contribute to students' ability to take on some of the other social-contextual issues or reinforce a sense of futility. The underlying rationale for the approach proposed in this guide is that literacy instruction *can* make a difference if its focus is on linking curriculum content to the struggle for change in the socio-economic conditions of students' lives. But it's important to keep in mind that literacy work is only one front in a larger struggle, and, by itself, it isn't a solution. It will be most effective when it is connected to this larger context rather than seen as a self-contained endeavor, or goal in itself.

Thus, it makes sense to think of circles of change moving from classroom practice to program structure to the broader socio-economic context. Hopefully this guide will be a concrete tool in each of these circles of change. In terms of the first circle, we hope that the guide provides not just a "how to", but a framework for looking critically at your own practice, as well as adapting and adding to what is presented here. In terms of the second circle, the guide may serve as a source of support in the struggle to create changes in structural aspects of adult literacy work. Specifically, we hope the sections on rationale, program structure, curriculum development processes, evaluation and findings will be copied and used in advocating for changes with legislators, funders, administrators and program designers.

Third, we hope that this guide will be a resource for linking literacy programs to other structures and organizations addressing the underlying socio-economic issues facing students - organizations dealing with workplace, housing or healthcare concerns as well as family literacy. It may be useful in developing context-specific curricula which emerge from and are integrated with the ongoing activities of these groups. Making meaning inside the classroom will extend to making change outside the classroom as adult ESL/literacy work becomes one arena among many, connected to a broader process of addressing the conditions in students' lives.

RESOURCES

Publications of the UMass English Family Literacy Project

English Family Literacy: An Annotated Bibliography. (1987). Compiled by A. Nash, introduction by E. Auerbach. ($3.00).

Looking Forward, Looking Back: Writings from Many Worlds. (1989). A collection of writings, drawings and photographs for use with adult literacy/ESL students. ($3.00).

Talking Shop: A Curriculum Sourcebook for Participatory Adult ESL. by A. Nash, A. Cason, M. Rhum, L. McGrail, and R. Gomez-Sanford. Teachers' accounts of classroom experiences using a participatory process. A companion volume to *Making Meaning, Making Change*. ($3.00).

The above publications may be ordered from:

Barbara Graceffa
Bilingual/ESL Graduate Studies
UMass/Boston
Boston, MA 02125-3393

All orders must be pre-paid (checks payable to the University of Massachusetts). Please add 10% for postage and handling.

In addition, the following articles, based on the work of the UMass English Family Literacy Project, can be obtained in the publications listed or reprints ordered from UMass:

Auerbach, E. 1989. Toward a social-contextual approach to family literacy. *Harvard Educational Review,* 59:2 (May). ($1.00).

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Participatory Curriculum Development: Theory

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Mosaic. The After School Project, South Boston High School, 95 G St. South Boston, MA 02127.

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Convergence. International Council for Adult Education. 29 Prince Arthur Ave. Toronto, ONT M5R 1B2.

Dialogue. Center for Applied Linguistics. 1118 22nd St. NW, Washington, DC 20037. (Newsletter on dialogue journals).

Focus on Basics. World Education, 210 Lincoln St., Boston, MA 02111.

The Ladder. Push Literacy Action Now. 1332 G St. SE, Washington, DC 20003.

Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Bulletin. RaPAL. Bolton Royd Centre, Manningham Lane, Bradford BD8 7BB, West Yorkshire, UK.

Voices Rising: A Bulletin about Women and Popular Education.. ICAE Women's Program, 394 Euclid Ave. Suite 308, Toronto, ONT M6G 2S9.

Addresses for Additional Resources

Lutheran Settlement House
1340 Frankford Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19125

Ontario Ministry of Citizenship
77 Bloor St. West, 5th fl.
Toronto, ONT M7A 2R9

Participatory Research Group (PRG)
394 Euclid Ave.
Toronto, ONT M6G 2S9

World Education
210 Lincoln St.
Boston, MA 02111

The Oral History Center
186½ Hampshire St.
Cambridge, MA 02139

National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education
1118 22nd St. NW
Washington, DC 20037